AN · OPEN · CREEL

H · T · SHERINGHAM

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AN OPEN CREEL

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

An Angler's Hours
Elements of Angling

AN OPEN CREEL

BY

H. T. SHERINGHAM

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
	INTRODUCTORY	vii
I.	WATERS OF YOUTH	1
II.	A YORKSHIRE BECK	24
III.	DACE-FISHING AT ISLEWORTH	36
IV.	THE ANGLER'S TEMPER	42
V.	SOME KENNET DAYS	49
VI.	DRY-FLY MEDITATIONS	65
	1. THE DAY OF RECKONING	65
	2. APRIL	69
	3. A MEMORY OF JUNE	74
	4. THE IMMORTALS	78
	5. THE EVENING RISE	82
	6. HOOKED AND LOST	87
	7. AUGUST	90
	8. THE BURDEN OF THE DRY-FLY MAN	94
VII.	A BASKET ON ALL FOOLS'	100
VIII.	A WELSH CARP LAKE	109
IX.	THE FLOAT	114
X.	A DAY OF TRIBULATION	120
XI.	THE PATH OF GOOD INTENTIONS	126
XII.	DAYS AT DRIFFIELD	133
XIII.	IMPERFECT SYMPATHIES	147
XIV.	HOT DAYS ON THE AVON	153

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CHAPTER		PAGE
XV.	MAYFLY ON A SURREY STREAM	159
XVI.	THE PHILOSOPHY OF FAILURE	166
XVII.	ON THE GLOUCESTERSHIRE COLN	172
	1. BIBURY	172
	2. FAIRFORD	180
XVIII.	THE INCALCULABLE GRAYLING	188
XIX.	NOVEMBER ON THE TILL	197
XX.	IN PRAISE OF CHUB	204
XXI.	A DAY ON CHALKLEY'S	214
XXII.	THE AUTUMN SALMON	220
XXIII.	A RUN OF LUCK	226
XXIV.	WEIR-POOLS	236
XXV.	TRIANGLES: A PIKE-FISHER'S LAMENT	241
XXVI.	ON A STORM-SWEPT PIKE POOL	246
XXVII.	THE SECRET OF THE CANAL	252
XXVIII.	THE NORFOLK BROADS	260
XXIX.	THE ANGLER AND THE BRIDGE	274
XXX.	BLAGDON	280
XXXI.	TWO COLNE TROUT	297

INTRODUCTORY

IN the course of a very kindly, and too flattering, notice of a little book of mine which appeared a few years ago, a reviewer said something which made me think. He pointed out the possibility of readers saying to themselves, "This person catches too many fish." And certainly, if I consider it honestly, there was about that volume a certain smugness; in nearly all its chapters fish were slain, and weighed, and reckoned up, and made the object of fat complacency. The result was, perhaps, a suggestion, implied if not made in so many words, that the world always went very well indeed for the volume's author, that for every morning on which he went light-hearted to the stream there was an evening on which he staggered back heavy-basketed to his lodging.

In this new volume, if any readers shall do me the honour to occupy themselves with it, they will find, as I hope, a better balanced picture of the contemplative man's recreation. There are fish in it, perhaps an undue number—for whose presence I would apologize with a submission that I could not keep them out:

those red-letter days simply *will* take possession of one's pen—but there are other things in it too, things which are practically a negation of fish, floods, bitter winds, droughts, and the like. Now and then, in fact, I have lifted the veil and given a glimpse of those sorrows which we anglers, like other decorous folk, would fain hide from a world that is apt to take its amusement as it finds occasion. Though the open creel sometimes reveals a catch of fish, there are occasions on which it is lamentably empty.

> The worldly hope men set their hearts upon
> Turns ashes—or it prospers—

Fishing is very like the other pursuits of men, compact of ill and good, the good being, as we think, not too lavishly bestowed on some of us. The season of any given angler (I except those prodigious fellows who never have a blank, who think in dozens and stones, and who cannot but come to a bad piscatorial end) is a calculable affair. Of the total number of his days, probably two-thirds will give him no results worth mentioning. Three-quarters of the rest will be of the type conveniently labelled as "fair to middling." And there may be two or three days of really fine sport, days about which he at once writes articles. An article or so may be written about days of the second class, but about those of the first there is a grim silence. Hence the number of fish in a book on fishing.

Francis Francis, I believe, once dryly remarked to an ecstatic angler who was eloquent upon the beauties of nature and the unimportance of slaughter that it doubtless was so, but he himself had noticed a kind of prejudice in favour of a brace of fish in the creel. He was quite right, of course. We all go out to catch fish. Circumstances make it harder for us to do so year by year; there are more of us, and waters are no more numerous, less rather, while fish grow daily more experienced. Therefore we probably do not expect to catch so much as did our fathers, and the sort of day which they would have regarded as "middling" is received by us in humble thankfulness as a glorious occasion. The standard of expectation is decidedly lower than it used to be.

At the same time love for the pastime has, if anything, become greater as well as more widespread. Life is a more hurried affair than it was, brains are subjected to sterner trial, nerves receive a more perpetual strain. It is necessary, therefore, that a man's hobby should be a haven of refuge as well as a mental or physical "change of occupation." And this the pastime of angling assuredly is. People sometimes ask me what I think about when I am fishing. A suppressed hopefulness in their tone indicates that I should be employing long quiet hours in thoughts of Tariff Reform, Woman's Suffrage, the "Encyclopedia Britannica," or some other good serious thing. As a matter of fact, the only answer which I could honestly

additional matter, make up the bulk of this volume. For the liberty to republish "The Float," "The Autumn Salmon," and a portion of "In Praise of Chub," I am indebted to the editor of the *Morning Post*.

AN OPEN CREEL

I—WATERS OF YOUTH

THE other day, while turning out some old papers by way of making the new year less crowded than its predecessor, I came upon a faded old photograph of a group of young people seated and standing in the constrained fashion of those who are being sacrificed to the amateur camera. One peculiarly villainous countenance purports to be my own, and I should not be too zealous to acknowledge the impeachment were it not for a certain far-away look in the eyes which has reminded me of something. I remember now that I was looking through the leafless trees at a glint of water, and wondering whether the three roach would live or die. In moments of crisis, such as are caused by the dentist's chair or the uncovered lens, one has these flashes of disconnected thought.

The three roach, as a matter of fact, were in the water, a small pond between the garden and the stable-yard, and I had put them there that morning just before luncheon. They came from a little river about half a mile away, and were the trophies of my angle, brought home in a landing-net to convince certain scoffers (the photograph punishes them enough)

who had said that no man could catch fish in the little river during the winter, because when earth is bound in frost-chains fishes burrow into the mud, and are no more seen. In those days my mind was by no means clear upon this point, but disagreement seemed to be expected of me, and I disagreed. More than that, I borrowed a primitive sort of rod and line from the principal scoffer, dug myself some worms, and went down the hill to the river after breakfast. The banks were hard with frost, and the edges of the stream were lined with ice, but, not a little to my surprise, I had some bites, and in a short time caught the three roach. Then I returned, cold but satisfied, to find that the fish were still alive when I got back to the house. So they were turned into the pond before a company of respectful onlookers. Maybe their descendants are there yet if the pond still exists.

The discovery of the old photograph and the memory of the incident of that day have set old strings in vibration, and thoughts of other ponds belonging to a further past come up unbidden. Among them are the ponds of Arden, the fair country in which I was privileged, with a small number of other boys, to imbibe the rudiments of education. We were a lucky set of youngsters in many ways. Too few in most years to make up an eleven at cricket or football, we were allowed a great deal of liberty for other country pursuits, and we used to cover miles every afternoon in search of birds' eggs, butterflies, and other treasures, or in following the hounds, which came within reach several times every season. One thing only was not regarded with favour by the authorities, and that was

fishing. I never quite understood why it was discouraged, but it was; only about once a term were we allowed to go out with the sanction of authority and angle in the little stream that ran through the village.

We always made a festival of this solemn occasion, and we nearly always caught something worth having, for we were easily satisfied. Minnows were not despised, gudgeon were greeted with rapture, and the occasional triumph of a roach, with gorgeous red eyes, was a thing beyond words. Once one of us caught a golden minnow, a very beautiful little fish such as I have never seen since, though I have heard of a specimen now and again. Most of our captures were kept alive and put into "the pond," a funny little piece of water in the stable yard, flanked on two sides by the kitchen-garden wall, and on the third by two small willow-trees. Round in shape, about twenty feet in diameter, and filled with débris in the shape of old tins, sunken fragments of toy boats, bottles, and other remnants, it was by no means the place into which fish ought to have been put, for their speedy demise was practically certain. The odd thing was, however, that our fish thrived in the uncongenial puddle. They would even take a worm at times, and, in default of better occupation, we used to angle for them with withy twigs, cotton lines, and bent pins. The gudgeon adapted themselves to the pond best, but bull-heads also lived there pretty well, and also stone-loach, when we could get them home alive, which was rather difficult. One afternoon a great surprise came to us in the shape of a little carp, which must have been in the pond all the time, for none of us

had ever put him there. He remains a mystery unsolved to this day.

There were other ponds in Arden—the stickleback pond which was within the school grounds, the newt pond in the copse where the bluebells grew, and others further afield which held genuine fish. To angle in these we had to be very subtle, and to escape the notice of the authorities in our exits and entrances. Even a telescopic Japanese rod does not look like a very convincing walking-stick, and an ordinary rod concealed partly by trousers and partly by coat must give its owner a curious gait. Perhaps the authorities winked at our *ruses innocentes*, perhaps we were never discovered. At any rate, I remember no dire penalties incurred on that count, though for other offences we were rightly chastised now and then. One of the distant ponds held a species of merry little fish of a reddish-bronze colour, which we never could catch. They would come and suck at the Russian lily-leaves close by our very feet in the most impudent manner, but they would not take any kind of paste or grub or worm, at any rate with a hook in it. What they were I still do not know, but I think they may have been crucian carp.

Another pond, which was really a kind of backwater of the river, was a very thrilling place. Here we angled concealed amongst the bushes at its edge in great fear and trembling, for not only was the place forbidden by the general law of piscary, but the school authorities used often to walk this way; moreover, there was a fierce notice-board upon a neighbouring tree, and the landowner was an object of much awe to us, being an intimate friend of the authorities, and therefore, pre-

sumably, in league with them, as well as anxious to conserve his own property. These tremors gave an added zest to the occasional captures that used to reward our visits. The fish were for the most roach, with one or two small chub. I never remember catching more than two at any one time. I grieve to say that Sunday afternoon was our favourite occasion for the foray. We presumed on the law of orthodox English nature which ordains that the forenoon of the day shall be spent in church, and the afternoon in quiet meditation on the sermon which has been preached. At least, that is my interpretation of Sunday proceedings now; in those innocent days we held that the authorities slept.

Some miles away from our school there was a lake which never ceased to rouse our curiosity and cupidity, and to the end of my life I shall remember the night when we first had ocular demonstration of its possibilities. There was a very aged person (he seemed so to us, being about eighteen) who came to read with the authorities, and to while away the time before some examination. Being so old, he was highly privileged, and to us he seemed a perfect Nimrod, for he had a gun and a real fly-rod, actually caught a trout in the little river, and even soared so high as to obtain permission to fish in the enchanted lake. And so one evening he returned with no less than eight roach which he had captured alone and unaided. They must have weighed about six ounces apiece, and spread out on rushes on a dish they made an imposing spectacle. Envy but mildly expresses my own feelings on that occasion. Not long afterwards another visit to the water

had even more wonderful results, and the hero came back with two fish bigger than seemed possible. They were bream, he said, and they weighed about two and a half pounds apiece. He was good enough to reward our open-mouthed admiration with some instructions on the art of catching these leviathans. I can still remember his telling us that you had to have two rods, bait with lobworms on the bottom, and sit afar off, maintaining absolute silence until a bite came. I have a shrewd suspicion that he had learnt these facts himself for the first time that very day (from the keeper), but I may be wrong; perhaps jealousy still lingers. In those better days, though I envied, I thought no guile. The opportunity of fishing that lake never came to me at that time, but in after years I visited it more than once. It is sad that the visits only led to a conviction that "we are not such as we were," and that it is unwise to seek interpretation of a happy dream.

One more pond is still vividly pictured before my eyes, and yet I only saw it twice. The authorities rode now and then to visit a clerical friend a good many miles away, and twice, on early summer afternoons, another boy and I went also on the ponies which were hired two or three times a week for our instruction in the art of riding. We thoroughly enjoyed these excursions, for the rector's cakes were of very noble quality and profusion. I was in a mood of great spiritual exaltation, after partaking thereof, when I first saw the pond, so my first impressions may have been transcendental. But undoubtedly the pond was a very lovely place. It lay at some distance from the house, and one had to jump down a ha-ha from the lawn, then crossing

a park-like meadow. The water was rectangular in shape, and probably not more than fifty yards long, though to me it seemed immense. But the most noticeable thing about it, even to a small boy thinking of fish, was the magnificent display of rhododendrons, whose great green leaves and glowing petals formed almost a wall round the banks. In the gaps grew long meadow grass, and the whole scene was vivid with life, for butterflies and lesser insects were everywhere. The water was of a greenish quality and looked deep, and I remember thinking that such a big pond, with such big flowers round it, must hold very big fish. But on that occasion I saw nothing, though the reverend lord of the soil, whom, despite a cynical smile from the authorities, I ventured to question on the subject, said that there were fish there, and that I might catch them next time if I liked. I was never able to try, alas! for my horsemanship did not warrant my carrying a rod as well as a crop, but on the second visit I saw a fish. It was unlike any fish that I see nowadays, being long and green, and moving like a ghost. I have been wondering ever since what it was.

Besides these ponds, there were two brooks, feeders of the small river. One contained loaches of noble size, but very difficult to catch, because the water was rather deep. To take these agile fish in Nature's way —which was our way—one ought to be able to stand in the bed of the stream, and, stooping, to make a trap of one's two hands, into which a fish would dart when judiciously stirred from under its stone. We had not read "Lorna Doone" in those days, so the idea of a loach-spear never occurred to us.

For the bull-heads in the other brook we used not only to grope, but also to angle. Sometimes we would do it in the most barefaced manner. Raising a likely stone, we discovered our quarry lurking beneath. If the stone was then very gently replaced, the fish apparently took no alarm, and after an interval a little red worm on a small hook placed at the edge of his haunt would have the desired effect. But there was one deep pool in which we had to use a float, and from this I—no, I am not sure that it was I—we caught on a never-to-be-forgotten day a fish, a great fish, a miraculous fish, a fish with red spots. It was the first trout, and it weighed belike two ounces. We went home, "striking the stars with our august heads." One more trout we had out of the same brook lower down, where it was bigger, but I will not dwell on the incident. It was at the period when we collected butterflies and were never abroad without butterfly-nets.

Contemporary with the schooldays in Arden are memories of fishing in the summer holidays, all detached and fragmentary. They amount to little more than a series of mental pictures, with myself more or less heroic in the foreground—more, as when, at about the age of ten, I saw the huge perch cruising about under the camp-sheeting, seized by main force the rod of a protesting but smaller playmate, and, again by main force, hauled the fish to dry land and fell upon it. I believe it weighed one and a half pounds. The rod, a telescopic Japanese thing, was broken in the crisis, and I seem to remember that there ensued what are popularly known as "words." I also remember the worm

which brought about that victory, a peculiarly yellow, bilious-looking object. Less heroic do I appear in the picture where, eager to be after the gudgeons in the backwater, I jump incautiously into the boat alongside the landing-stage, and fall out of it on the other side. The presence of grown-up spectators, who regarded me as a heaven-sent opportunity for mirth, made the experience a bitter one. Besides, I was sent home to change, and so wasted a whole glorious hour of life.

Other pictures of early days include a bridge over a canal, under which I used to sit, heart in mouth, gazing down into the clear water at very small perch in session about my bait; and a weir-pool on the Yorkshire Derwent, where I caught gudgeon and watched an impressive figure standing on a stone near the further shore fly-fishing for, I was told, grayling. I did not know what grayling were, but I saw the flash of silver when he used his landing-net, and assumed them to be a specially desirable kind of roach. One holiday was spent at Berwick-on-Tweed, and there I made the acquaintance of the "poddler." That sporting fellow —the young of the coalfish—became promptly the centre of existence for me. Waking or sleeping, I thought of nothing but poddlers, and was to be found at all hours of the day walking up and down the long stone pier, holding a long rod and trailing in the water the traditional tackle—three white flies, a pipe-lead, and a baby spinner—or sitting with my feet dangling over the edge, and offering pieces of herring for the consideration of any fish that cared for them.

Once I caught a large red mullet, which made me

very proud. Once, too, I assisted, as spectator, in a great draught of salmon, seventy or eighty of them in the net all at once. I approved of the proceedings when the fishermen leaped into the shallow water and began to lay about them with their clubs; but otherwise I was not much interested in salmon. Poddlers were *my* fancy. They caused me to refuse to go to Edinburgh, Melrose, and other objects of family pilgrimage; they made me think and speak slightingly of the Whitadder, whither I was lured one day by false promises of trout; they filled me with a hatred for a certain person which I have hardly got over yet. He was about my own age, and he carried two immense ones on a string. And he refused for them three-halfpence, and a pocket-knife, and a hook! Poddlers, in fact, were the important part of Berwick-on-Tweed. They *were* Berwick-on-Tweed.

Some matters are there which it were well to touch on but lightly—my first catch of jack, for instance, made with a Devon minnow in April! A severe reproof by a stranger as I walked home displaying them in triumph gave me my first idea of what the close season meant. Other memories, however, are legitimate enough and very delightful. I fear I should not now find fair a certain small stream, branch of an important river, which of old gave me much thrilling sport, but in those days it was as a river of Eden. Somewhere in the background of recollection is a consciousness that its bottom was principally composed of tin cans, bottles, and other contributions from a neighbouring small town; some faint echo of a whisper seems to remind me that the same small town

trusted largely to Providence and the flowing water for a sewage system; but in effect I do not remember these drawbacks. What I do remember is the ancient willow leaning out over the stream, and the eddy below it caused by the release of water narrowed by the willow roots. There was a blissful day when I caught four dozen roach out of that eddy and at the edge of the stream. The fish came on to feed about mid-day, and they would only take little red worms—rather an odd thing in summer. I was, of course, late for lunch and duly reprimanded, but I had such a basket of roach as no other boy took out of the stream those holidays. That the fish scarcely averaged three ounces apiece does not even now dim the glory of that achievement.

There were other triumphs connected with that mile of water. Many small chub were captured there with a red palmer. They always lay close under the opposite bank, and the fly had to fall within an inch of the clay or weeds. Sometimes a fish would rise immediately like a trout, but more often it would follow the fly for some distance, making quite a decent wave. Then the tightening line would announce the time to strike, and the half-pounder would be hooked and played. Very fair sport he would give, too, for I used to fish with a tiny greenheart rod, about eight feet six inches long, whose weight must have satisfied the most zealous light-rod man. It was the right rod for a boy, and it was also the right rod for getting the greatest amount of fun out of small chub. Three large chub are prominent in early memories. The capture of one is described on a later page. Another was a Wye fish,

for whose better undoing I had to ascend a tree. Seated in the fork, which overhung a deep, still pool, I perceived my friend and others of lesser calibre basking on the surface. A lump of cheese paste was carefully lowered, allowed to hang in the water just before his nose, and taken. The rest is confusion, and I have no clear memory of what happened, except that it was all very exciting, and that the tree, and my rod, and the chub, and I got much mixed up. But the fish came out at last, and weighed—I know not what. I used to call him three pounds. The other monster came later than either of the two mentioned, from the Teme, and I remember it chiefly as being the reward of patience. I fished for it persistently for two days, and at last got it on an alder. It weighed three and a half pounds on the scales, and was a great triumph.

Chub played, on the whole, the most important part in my early fishing, and they were my earliest instructors in fly-fishing. The Thames was the scene of the first exploits, two joints of a relative's salmon rod the first fly-rod, and a one-ounce chub the first fish caught with fly. I visited the same reach again not long ago, and the glory of it is departed. Even the one-ounce chub is no longer to be caught—by me, at any rate—and the whole scene is woefully altered. It does not do to "revisit Yarrow." Still, one has one's memories, and I shall always think with awe of the three great perch below the footbridge that came up out of the depths after my worm, looked at me, and went down again. On the strength of those perch I laid out three-halfpence in Abingdon on the purchase of a "hook to gimp"—silver gimp, I remember, and

very pleasing to the eye. The investment was not remunerative. That same week, however, I received a gift which was. By the backwater I came upon a grown-up angler who had a roach nearly as big as himself. He told me that it was two and a half pounds, and that he had caught it with red lead. He gave me of this miraculous bait, and that same evening I caught a roach of three quarters of a pound myself on a piece of it, thereby breaking my record utterly. I have never tried the bait since, but no doubt it makes a good colouring matter for paste.

It must have been about three years later when I made my first decent bag of perch, an occasion never to be forgotten. It was on Shakespeare's Avon, a mile or two above Stratford. The August day was what an August day should be, and a blazing sun had driven me into the shade of some willows which lined the stream. The basket was empty, which was not surprising, the water being clear as glass and the heat intense; even the little fish of seven or eight inches, which at that time satisfied my modest aspirations, had declined to nibble at the proffered worm.

It was, perhaps, the tempting coolness of the deep water under the trees which made me peer round one of them and look down into the stream; it was certainly a lucky accident which made me aware of vague forms moving in and out, to and fro, below the tangle of roots and red fibres. I gazed fascinated for a time, and at last, as eyes grew accustomed to the play of light through the branches above, made out the identity of the forms; they were perch, and such a shoal of them as I had never seen before. This ascertained,

of course the question arose how they were to be caught. The branches and twigs came down so low, and the trees were so close together, that plying the rod was impossible. After much deliberation I cut a withy shoot about four feet long, and tied the gut-cast to it after taking off the float. Then I had an apparatus which was manageable, and with which I could get the thrilling joy of seeing the perch actually take the worm as it sank down among them, or, more often, as it was being drawn up. I do not now remember how many I caught or what they weighed, but my small creel was quite full by the time I had finished, and I think some of the captives must have been over a pound. I learnt more about perch and their ways on that single afternoon than I should have from years of orthodox float-fishing. Even now the lesson that perch like a bait which moves slowly up and down still serves me in good stead sometimes. But I fear I shall never again know quite so fine a rapture as came to me at its first learning.

At about the same period I first made acquaintance with the old Priory Pond, a marvellous piece of water in an otherwise fishless part of Gloucestershire; the most desirable spot on earth, it seemed to me, when I had discovered its secrets. It was rectangular in shape, about half an acre in size, and the monks made it; so, at least, local history averred. A kind of ancient culvert connected the pond with a short creek which joined the brook, and twice every day the water ebbed and flowed under the little bridge which spanned the neck between pool and creek. Why there should be an inland tide of this sort was always something of a mystery in those days. Subsequent

meditation has suggested that when the mill situate in the ancient Priory buildings started of a morning then did the water flow; when the mill stopped at the dinner-hour, then did the water ebb. The movement of the waters was repeated when the mill started again in the afternoon and when it stopped in the evening. If the monks devised this scheme of letting fresh water into the pond without turning the brook through it, they accomplished a very pretty piece of water engineering, and calculated levels with good skill in the mathematics. The arrangement was doubtless helped by the fact that another mill dammed the brook a hundred yards below, and was worked but seldom. Indeed, the streamlet scarce afforded power for two mills within three hundred yards of one another.

Besides making the pond, the monks, it is to be presumed, put in the carp also, in spite of the old legend which makes the bronze fish but a late-comer to these shores. And, having put those carp in, they could not catch them; or, possibly, they did catch one, and so filled the others with caution. Certain it was that never had a carp been taken since, at any rate by fair angling. There are, it is said, carp that will bite at honey paste, at little new potatoes, at green-peas, and even at garden worms. But those of the Priory Pond would not bite at anything. The fish were extremely fat—almost round—and they rolled about beneath my very feet, much, of course, to my excitement, since I had never dreamed of monsters in such profusion, much less seen them. It happened that I had lately read instructions for carp-catching—in *The Boy's Own Paper*, I think—so I set about the

venture methodically. But there were no results. Whole gardens of vegetables, pots of honey, loaves of bread were squandered, nests of wasps, hills of ants, heaps of mixen were ransacked to make them bite, but they rolled on undismayed, uninterested. The wonder was how fish that never ate anything could be so round, so obviously bloated with excess of good living. Probably they did eat, but only after the angler was gone. The monks had taught them, in their days of comparative youth, that it was unwise to feed when a long straight thing cast its shadow over the water. And a lesson once learnt is with a carp never forgotten. What the monsters weighed none may know, but some of them were as big as market-going porkers.

When the time wasted on these insensate wretches had run into a term of weeks the roach were discovered. Little ones, indeed, had been caught now and then on the carp tackle, but no serious roach-fishing had been attempted, because the carp had been too big and too obvious. Then one day, at the time of the ebb, a little red worm was dropped casually over the bridge that crossed the culvert into the creek. The float was fixed about three feet from the hook, and swam merrily down towards the brook. But not far, for almost at once it went under as though the hook had caught on the bottom. The rod was lifted to free it, and then a gleam in the water revealed the true cause, and a gallant roach of fully one and a quarter pounds was fighting for his liberty. He was landed, the hook was re-baited, and immediately a second glittering fish with ruddy fins took his place in the battle. Before the water had ceased to ebb a dozen handsome roach lay

on the grass—a noble sight. They averaged about three quarters of a pound, and the first was the biggest. Afterwards a day was set aside for a real onslaught on the roach, and it was a day to remember. The fish bit with the enthusiasm of inexperience; probably they had never seen a hook and line before, and on the ebb they were caught literally as fast as the line could be rebaited and dropped in. On the flow they bit, too, but more gingerly, while at slack water they would only bite now and then. The catch at the close of day was far and away the biggest I ever made as a boy, and I have only equalled it once or twice since.

There was no great roach day after that. It may have been that all the big ones in the creek were caught. In the pond itself nothing over half a pound came to the net. But fishing there incidentally revealed something else that was worthy of note. One evening a small roach that had just been hooked was seized by an invisible monster, which ran out the line and broke it. On the morrow pike tackle was brought to bear on the situation, valuable assistance being rendered by a family retainer who was as keen a fisher as I, and more expert. A small live roach was sent out with a float to entice the fish of prey. Very soon there was a run, the float went under, and stayed under. But a strike only lost the bait and hooked nothing. A second time this happened, and a third. Then the snap tackle was taken off, a strong single hook was substituted for it, and time was given at the next attack. These tactics were in a measure successful, but only in a measure. A very powerful fish was hooked, but it went straight into some unseen obstacle at the bottom

and broke the stout gut like cotton. And similar misfortunes came afterwards until the thing began to look almost uncanny; no pike could have behaved in so arbitrary and consistent a fashion. Could those mysterious carp have anything to do with it? But at last an explanation came, as a great writhing eel was dragged up from the bottom by sheer force. It weighed three and a half pounds, but it was a mere infant compared with some of the others that had refused to come to the net. Other eels of about the same size were landed on other days, but the monsters always got away.

Among these distant waters there are only one or two trout streams proper, and they do not provide me with many memories of success. My first efforts with the fly for trout convinced me that the method was quite useless, and that such agile fish could not be hooked with bits of feather. But the year after I caught the one-ounce chublings I rose a trout—at any rate the gardener, the first authority in my eyes, said I had done so, and I was very willing to believe him. I fancy it was rather a tame fish, for it lived in a brook running through a garden at Cirencester, and it was never alarmed at me or my ingenuous hurling of the March brown. I do not remember any other trout in that brook, but there were some enormous minnows.

It was a year or so later when I made my first basket of trout in a little brook running into the Wye near Rhayader. The event followed close on the heels of the capture of the chub from the tree, already recorded, and was even more satisfactory. My elders and betters had regarded the chub without enthusiasm, which had vexed me; as they angled themselves

assiduously, I put their attitude down to jealousy. On the great day they went off to fish some private water on the Wye, and I in my wanderings came upon this little nameless stream. From it, with a worm, I extracted half a dozen trout of a quarter of a pound each, and returned triumphant, to find the older anglers talking gloomily of low water and hopeless conditions. In a word, they had two small trout between them, and I had "wiped their eye." They admitted it generously, and from that day I was a confirmed trout-fisher, with views on the uncertainty of the sport, and an experience whence illustrations might be drawn—with economy. But on the subject of catching trout with a fly I was, and remained for some time after, reticent. It had been pointed out to me rather forcibly that samlets were not trout, and that if one treated them as such one would go to prison. I rather feared that I had treated some samlets as trout, even going so far as to assert that they were trout; at any rate, they were all the trout that I had so far caught with the fly.

Of other trout-fishing in the golden days, memories centre for the most part round a certain insignificant brook in the western Midlands, in which, year by year, I used to perform prodigies of patience, in obedience to the law that causes the angler to strive after the unattainable. Looking back, I can see that March was rather early for trout-fishing in such a stream, but a schoolboy's logic rose superior to counsels of perfection. If the holidays began in March, contemporaneously more or less with the end of all coarse fishing, it followed without further argument that trout-fishing began at precisely that date; holidays

without fishing, of course, were an impossibility. However, there were circumstances that took away much of the reproach of anticipating the season proper.

Chief among these was the fact that the brook only contained five trout, in the portion, at least, which it was my privilege to fish. I arrived at this exactitude of knowledge by a process of reasoning based on experience, and by the thoughtful habit that grows upon one when one is accustomed to walk several miles in the evening with an empty creel swinging airily at one's back. One of these five trout I was lucky enough to catch the first March that ever I visited the place, and when I had made no more than six, or it might be seven, expeditions. He took a worm which had been left to fish by itself, while, boylike, I sought distraction and birds' nests, and he weighed six ounces—a very fine example of *Salmo fario* as it seemed to me, and rendered even more estimable by the trouble it was to get him out. He had taken advantage of my absence to entangle himself and the line in the roots of a willow, and it was necessary to wade in and dig him therefrom.

Over the next two seasons I will draw a veil. They yielded no trout at all, and went a long way towards instilling scepticism, pessimism, and other "isms" that are not taught in schools into the youthful mind, and there is no need to linger over them. But the fourth season I secured a fish in a way that I am sure would have won me an "excellent good" from old Izaak himself, upon whose instructions my actions were, in fact, based. Just below the mill-pound there

was a tiny backwater, not above four feet wide in most parts, and it was fringed with a wall of bushes. Here and there lay little round pools, and in one of these I discovered a monstrous fish, very much bespotted, and altogether beyond the dreams of avarice. He rose and took some floating trifle while I was peeping over the bush, and that decided me. The water was too clear for a worm, but it was possible to dibble, and I at once sought diligently for a bait.

Insect life is not abundant in March, and it took me a long time to find anything that seemed large enough for so vast a trout, but at last, under a log, I captured a beetle of some size. Whether a beetle would be any good for trout was unknown, but it was worth trying. Presently the tip of the rod was projecting over the bush, and the insect dangled over the water, descending by slow degrees to the desired spot. I dared not look over to see what happened, and had to trust to Providence to direct matters aright. Providence was kind, and there was a sudden plunge, a jerk of the rod-top, and I was holding on like grim death to a trout that fought as never trout fought before—at least, in my experience up till then. Tackle, however, in the days of youth was not refined away to invisibility; the gut stood the strain easily enough, and, after quite a short time, I was rejoicing over the captive form of my opponent. He only weighed a pound when all is said, but youth does not estimate its trophies altogether from the avoirdupois standard. It sufficed that he was a larger trout than any I had caught hitherto.

So passed that season in a halo of comparative glory, but it was eclipsed by the fifth and last March

that was spent by the brook. In the interval I had learnt on other and more troutful waters some of the mysteries of fly-fishing proper, and when the spring holidays came round again I proudly renounced all baser lures and sought the place with a fly-rod. At the top of the backwater was a little weir, or, to be more accurate, a shallow slide of water from a flood-gate in the mill-pound, which ran for some yards along the side of a brick wall. It had always been marked down as a likely spot, but had been diligently fished with the worm in vain. This year, however, there had been a good deal of rain in February, and the brook was full, with the result that the water-slide was increased in volume and capacity. It was not easy to get at, for it was overgrown with brambles, and on the side away from the wall was an osier-bed; but, by standing in the six inches of ripple below, it was just possible to flick a fly into the rough water, and let it come down by the edge of the wall.

These tactics were at once adopted, and a large March brown was flicked into the foam. There was an immediate check; I tightened, thinking the fly might have caught in something, and found that the something was a trout, which at once jumped out of the water, and then rushed madly all over his circumscribed abode, to my great alarm, for he seemed much bigger than the one of the year before, and it was almost certain that he would get off or break me. Yet, in spite of forebodings, all went well; he did not attempt to run down towards me; his exertions merely exhausted him to no purpose, and in the fullness of time I got him safely into the net—a really nice fish

of one and a half pounds. This was a triumph indeed, and I was tempted to stop fishing, and carry the fish joyfully home, exhibiting him to all whom I might meet on the way. But calmer counsels prevailed, and, after putting him carefully in my basket on a bed of grass, I tried the runnel again, not in the hope of another fish, but from an impulse to do something. Then an astonishing thing happened. A second trout took the fly in exactly the same manner as the first, and, after not quite so long a fight, was also landed—a fish of one and a quarter pounds. Almost incredulous, I tried once more, and hooked a third fish, of about a pound, which got off. After that there were no more rises. But my cup was full to overflowing, for this one day had yielded more fish than all the years that preceded it.

This success persuaded me that I had underrated the possibilities of the brook, and induced me to fish it with great vigour. But I never saw a trout in it again. The fish I hooked and lost came to an untimely end, falling to the gun of the miller's man, to whom I foolishly and expansively revealed his whereabouts, and I believe it to have been the last of its tribe.

II—A YORKSHIRE BECK

THE dry-fly man is without doubt one of the noblest products of the age (*experto crede*—that is to say, see his writings *passim*), and I have always been proud to be his humble imitator. I can dry my fly as vigorously, and put my fish down as masterfully, as any member of the school; and I can talk of a pounder as a small one, which would of course have had to be returned, had he been caught, with nonchalance. In fact, among those who cast at a venture and those who use the worm, I do not fear to announce myself a disciple of the dry fly, or even to illustrate the methods of greasing a line or slinging an oil-bottle, "as we practise them on the Itchen." But there come times when I forget the good principles that have been painfully acquired, when I consult a certain shabby old fly-book instead of the admirable new japanned box, when I even go so far as to strip a hook of its double wings and hackle, and to dig about in the bank for a worm. I fear the truth is that I am not a real "purist," and never shall be; I take too much interest in fishing at large.

However, it was as a dry-fly man that I paid my first visit to Ghyll Beck, as I take liberty to call it. It

rises on the high moor of the North Riding, trickles among heather and over slabs of rock for a while, and then disappears for a mile or two in a continuous cavern of foliage. You can hear it readily when you walk that way, and its music is sweet; but to see it you must take pains, peering round the bole of a tree or through the network of branches and twigs. To get a worm into it—well, neither you nor I can do that. Mæcenas can, but then he is a friend of the arts, and, moreover, the broad acres through which Ghyll Beck flows are his, so I count it proper that he should be able to do this thing, without praying in aid that natural genius for beck-fishing which he modestly disclaims.

Mæcenas had given me fair warning as to the nature of the stream, and had said that the worm was the only thing. But when did your dry-fly man ever pay heed to good advice? It is the habit of human nature to trust to the individual star, and I hoped to find an open space or so where the dry fly was bound to score. Also, dutifully regarding a pounder as barely sizable, I scarcely proposed to do more than conduct an experiment, just retaining a dozen or so of the better fish that the house-party might have trout to breakfast.

In this lofty state of mind I took my ten-foot split-cane rod, telescopic landing-net, and japanned box (the fly-book was in a very secret pocket) down to the beck, "just to see what the dry fly would do there." It was not a promising day; heavy mist hung over the moor-tops, and a drizzling rain swept the valley on a cold wind. However, little trout that had never seen a dry fly would not omit to rush at it for trivial

reasons of that kind. As I hastened downhill to the beck I was, on the whole, a very creditable dry-fly man, serenely confident in science and split wings.

I reached the beck and looked at it, japanned box in hand. The survey made me thoughtful. Here was no placid stream flowing between rushes; here were no Ephemeridæ, no Phryganidæ, no Coleoptera; here was no stout *fario* sucking in these fine families. Here, in fact, was no place for the dry fly, in this tiny trickle flowing securely under bushes at the bottom of the ravine between the two precipices that it called its banks. In that instant I forswore the dry fly, put away the japanned box, and sought the fly-book. Two hackle flies a foot apart, fished wet, would be the thing for this water, and I put them on. All being ready, I spent half an hour in searching for a place where I could introduce them to the stream. I only succeeded in getting the tail-fly on once, and that was by dibbling over a bush. A trout took it, and was twitched out—a fish of about three inches. By this time I was so little of a dry-fly man that I regretted my generosity the moment I had returned him. After that I lost both my flies in a tree, and paused to consider.

The method I was employing was obviously useless. A twenty-foot salmon rod would have suited the water no worse than the weapon I was using, and any more dibbling was out of the question in such a wind. The only chance was a willow wand plied from the bed of the stream, and a single fly switched up into the stickles. After deliberation, I took off the cast, wound up the line, and unshipped the butt of the rod. Then I threaded the line though the rings of the two upper

joints, and put the reel in my coat-pocket. By this means I had a rod of about six and a half feet, and a line that would run more or less if necessary. Thus newly equipped, I climbed down the precipice and got into the stream.

So far as switching about three yards went, the device was successful; so far as fish went—well, I cannot speak so strongly. I toiled along over the rock and shingle and under the bushes for half a mile or so, and did not get a rise; indeed, I only saw one fish, and that was no bigger than the one I had returned. But at last I came to a positive pool, nearly two feet deep and quite fifteen feet long. At its tail I got a rise, and landed a beauty of two ounces or rather less. Being no longer a dry-fly man, scarcely even an exponent of the wet fly, I felt privileged to call him a beauty. I did so two or three times, and then went home to luncheon, whereat I announced, in response to inquiries about the dish of trout for breakfast, that the fish had not been rising owing to the mist, low water, and other things that need not be recapitulated. After all, dry-fly practice has its uses.

The next morning I left the butt of the rod behind, and started off with the modified equipment. The landing-net was also left behind. It was a much more hopeful day, with intervals of sun and cloud, and I was determined to make the most of it, to fish the beck rather lower down, where it was somewhat bigger, and to provide that breakfast course which honour demanded. The beginning was heartrending. From the bank I saw a large fish, fully a quarter of a pound, without his seeing me. He took a blue upright flicked gently over

to him. I tried to lift him out up the bank, and he fell in again with a splash. It was as bitter a moment as I have known for years, for I was convinced that he was the "monarch of the brook," and that as he hung in the air glory hung with him. I entered the brook afterwards, feeling depressed. Almost at once, however, I saw a trout of two ounces, and that cheered me. He lay in the stickle at the tail of a tiny pool, and rose at something. The fly fell wide of him, but he rushed across at it, and was hooked. Three kicks, and he was off, while the fly was stuck firmly in a bough above. It was another bitter moment, but I put on a new point and fly, and moved to the next pool. Here a precisely similar thing happened, a trout getting off after a second of flurry. And in the next five minutes I lost two more.

After this the fishing seemed to change its character. Whether it was the weather, or the time of day, or the angle of the sunbeams, I know not, but the trout became wild. I crept up to within switching distance of a pool that turned a sharp corner, and took every care that no part of me or the rod should be visible. Then I put one eye round the corner, and behold! every fish in the pool was scurrying for shelter; one of them was a big one, too, like the first I had hooked. Time after time this happened, and it was only in about three places that I got a fly in front of a fish at all. On each of these occasions the little fellow dashed at it like a tiger, but stopped short without taking and examined it minutely, retreating backwards the while. He then returned to his position, and remained motionless. At the second sight of the fly he began

to quiver all over, and at the third he fled precipitate. These were the only incidents that morning that made me feel like a dry-fly man, and even then it was scarcely like a purist of the highest type.

At last I grew desperate, and, so to speak, invited Providence to "come on." I had reached the stage of stripping a hook of its wings and hackle and attaching the naked instrument to my cast. Providence was willing for the fray, and "came on." I procured a piece of stick, and dug furiously in the moist bank for worms. There were none. So I returned to luncheon, and afterwards took train for the South in thoroughly chastened mood.

Two years passed, during which at intervals I pondered on the beck and the problem whether its trout could not by some impossibility be cozened with the fly. An invitation to revisit the scene quickened thought into action, and I routed out a little old nine-foot greenheart rod which had not seen the light for years. For it I caused to be made a new butt nine inches long, and so became the possessor of the smallest fly-rod in the world—six feet three inches. This I took up to Yorkshire and displayed with all an inventor's pride, much, I imagine, as one would exhibit the latest triumph in aeroplanes. I had forgotten that science never stands still. When Mæcenas with a genial smile produced a rod (a real rod in two joints, not a makeshift like mine) several inches shorter, my feelings became like (I am imagining again) those of the inventor who has just seen his aeroplane descend to earth unexpectedly. That, however, is by the way, and I must get on to Monday.

It was a most curious day. The world was wrapped in a blanket of what seemed half thundercloud, half mountain mist. Not a breath of air stirred the smallest leaf, the heat was intense, and the light was shocking. The weather could not have been more unpropitious for trout-fishing; but the beck was in good volume after the recent rains, and one never knows what may happen, so I started off in knee-boots and mackintosh, and armed with a few worms "in case," soon after breakfast, being driven to a point about two miles down the valley, whence I could drop down the hill to the water, there a good deal less bushed than up above. I put on a two-yard cast, with a black gnat as tail-fly and a blue upright as dropper. Both these alighted on a bush at the first cast over the first little pool, and remained there. But I think I had frightened all the trout in it before that. Repairs completed, I scrambled down the steep bank and got into the stream to fish the next pool. Again all the trout were disturbed before a cast had been made, but in other respects I was more fortunate, the dropper only being lost this time.

After this there was a succession of almost open pools for some way, so I was quite economical of flies. But the trout were amazingly shy. It seemed to be quite impossible to get within casting distance of them, even from below. From the tail of each pool as I approached two or three fish would dart off upstream, frightening all the rest, as the pools were barely a foot deep, and frustrating the most cautious advance. It was some time before the ice was broken by the capture of a four-inch trout from a stickle more

lively than the rest, and I began to think that Ghyll Beck was not a fishable water at all. Then, by a lucky accident, I discovered one of its secrets. I lost both flies in a tree overhead (I shall not dwell on this recurring feature of the day again, but may just mention that the total was six black gnats, three blue uprights, two March browns, two red spinners, and six or seven "assorted" droppers), and had to renew them and half the cast. This I did standing where I was under the tree and within a cast of the pool above it, in which I had already seen alarms and excursions going on.

The repair took some minutes, and then I avoided the tree by an underhand switch cast, and the flies fell just at the tail of the pool. Instantly there was a bold rise, and my first sizable trout came tumbling and splashing downstream into the net. It was quite a nice one of three ounces. Two little things were hooked, landed, and returned before I moved, and I had yet more before the pool was finished, turning over a good one in the stream at its head. This revealed a policy which seemed likely to pay—to get into position for each pool, and then to wait for a few minutes until the trout should have got over their alarm. And pay it did after a modest fashion, for by a belated luncheon-time I was possessed of half a dozen trout averaging about three ounces, and very pleased with myself. Besides them, there had been a number of small ones returned, and one or two interesting experiences. On a sandy glide above a pool, for instance, I became aware of two eels, each about half a pound in weight, grubbing amicably about like two dogs among rat-holes. Then,

while I was putting a worm on the tail-fly to see whether one of them would take it, the eels suddenly fell out about something and began to fight, worrying each other like the aforesaid dogs. Of the worm they took no notice at all, and one of them finally drove the other into a hole under the bank. I was so engrossed in watching them that I did not perceive a monstrous great trout, which had sprung from nowhere, and was coming open-mouthed after the worm. I moved suddenly, and he turned tail, to my grief, for he was all of a quarter of a pound.

A little later, while I was repairing damages (*tamen usque recurret!*), I looked up and saw a large stoat crossing the shallow stream a few yards above me. It galloped rather than ran, evidently not much liking the water. Then it disappeared in a hedge which ran down to the stream. Immediately out came a rabbit, which sat and waited to see whether it was pursued. The stoat did not appear, and after a little bunny crept up to the hedge and peeped through, went a little higher and peeped again, and finally, coming to the conclusion that the coast was clear, disappeared with a joyful flirt of its white scut. It was for all the world like a child playing hide-and-seek. Soon after this I had the sport of the day, in a rather deep pool, overhung by a willow and fed by a kind of natural waterfall. Two trout came at me and were basketed, one from the still water under the boughs, and the other from the rough stream at the top, and they weighed just under five ounces and five and a half ounces respectively, *par nobile fratrum*. On the tiny rod and gossamer gut they really made a great fight. They were also the

last of the day, for the sky got so dark that I suspected the advent of a heavy storm, and went on upstream without fishing any more. It was just as well I did, for the going was very arduous, steep banks, ditches, stone walls, cliffs, brushwood barriers, and other things making the heat seem absolutely stifling. It took me more than an hour to cover about two miles of ground, now in the beck and now out of it, and the rain began just as I was in sight of home. One thing I noted for the morrow—that for fishing purposes I was obviously on the wrong side. For the day I was well satisfied, having eight trout, all caught on the black gnat.

Tuesday dawned with mist, which soon turned to steady rain, the fulfilment of Monday's sinister promise. But when I started fishing at the same place as before, I found that the beck was a good deal lower and the fish even shyer. For fully an hour I did nothing at all except get hung up. It is astonishing how on a small stream the most inconsiderable twig sticking out of the water, the tiniest corner of a submerged stone, the solitary overhanging thistle or head of grass, will exercise a magnetic attraction for one's flies, to say nothing of bushes, trees, and other real obstacles. Possibly something depends on one's mood. I was discouraged by finding the water so low, and had a presentiment that I should do very little. Then, just above a little bridge, casting round a corner, I got a fish of two ounces, and felt better. The rain also became heavier, and dimpled the surface of the pools, making fishing easier, so I got several more trout in quick succession. The first was on the black gnat, but the others all took a red spinner, which served as dropper.

There was a noticeable difference in the spots where the fish rose on the two days.

On Monday they mostly came from the deeper, stiller water, but to-day they were nearly all in the stickles. The best, a fish of about five ounces, was lying in a place where there was barely enough water to cover him, a sharp run entirely surrounded with bushes and only to be covered by a sort of steeple-cast, which is a very useful thing on these tiny streams. Straightforward casting, indeed, was scarcely possible anywhere after the first half-mile. Steeple, switch, and catapult casts had to be employed, and the shortness of the rod was a decided help. The great thing in this sort of fishing is not to be afraid. You must expect to lose some flies, but a bold policy often makes it possible to cover spots which look quite unapproachable. You have to forget all about the rule of extending line behind, and to treat it as though it were no longer than the rod: often this forcing method will get it out, even though it is three or four times as long. I do not know how it is done, but it can be done.

I continued to catch fish at intervals till about 4 p.m., and then the beck began to rise, the trout ceased to move, and my luck deserted me. At 4.5 p.m. I scrambled up a steep bank, and tore a great rent in a new mackintosh. At 4.10 p.m. I climbed over a gate, out of which a nail projected, and did my raiment even more serious damage. At 4.15 p.m. I got in over the top of my left knee-boot. A little later I got my cast entangled in a bush and frayed it to ribbons, so I took it off, put on worm-tackle, and, after catching one more trout, lost that. Then I reached the spot

where the day before I had decided that I was on the wrong side of the beck, and got across with great labour, only to find that the other side was even more wrong. A high hedge seemed to have grown up in the night, and I could not see the water at all! After that I went home—a mild way of describing the return, which involved climbing, creeping, slipping, falling, and rending of garments. Incidentally I knocked down a loose stone wall, or a considerable part of it, and was nearly buried in the débris. There are those who say that fishing is a tame proceeding! But it was a delightful day notwithstanding, and I found on arrival that I had caught no fewer than a dozen. My first two days on Ghyll Beck produced one trout, the next two twenty, so I feel that the score is settled.

III—DACE-FISHING AT ISLEWORTH

THE angler might travel very much farther and fare very much worse. That is my thought every time I visit Isleworth fly-rod in hand, and it is strange if September or October does not find me there at least once in each year. I have made the expedition pretty often now, but the charm of it never fails ; it is like nothing that I know in the way of fishing near London. Nowhere else can one feel that one is literally cheating Fate out of a few happy hours. When one goes farther afield, to the Colne, perhaps, at West Drayton, Uxbridge, or Rickmansworth, there is the sense of an undertaking about it; one is earning the right to enjoyment by dint of railway travelling, by having made "arrangements," by being burdened with a landing-net and possibly lobworms—one is definitely out for the day. But Isleworth is a simple, unpremeditated sort of matter. At luncheon-time one has a sudden conviction that too much work is telling on one's health, and that an afternoon off is the right medicine. A glance at the paper tells one that the tide was high at London Bridge at half-past nine; a simple calculation proves that, since it is an hour later at Richmond, the Isleworth shallows will begin to be

fishable at about two. A light ten-foot rod, a reel, fly-box, and basket take no long time to collect; the rubber knee-boots stand ready in their corner. One is equipped and away almost as soon as the idea has been formed.

It matters little that the train stops at all stations, and that the carriages are primitive almost to archaism. *En route* for Richmond these things are just and proper. One likes to see people getting in and out full of business. Even if one does not quite understand why anyone living in Gunnersbury should apparently be in such a hurry, so impatient to get to Kew Gardens and urgent affairs, this does not mar the sense of personal emancipation; rather it enhances it by contrast. One could get out at Kew Gardens oneself, by the way, walk down to the towpath, and fish up to Isleworth, and I have done this once or twice. But I prefer on the whole to go on to Richmond now and walk downstream. Richmond has made efforts of late to get into line with the times, but mercifully its fascination will not easily be destroyed. Modernity mellows there by the side of age better than in almost any place I know. As a matter of fact, one sees little of the town, for almost opposite the station yard is a gate leading to the old deer park. It is about ten minutes' walk across the park to the towpath, which one strikes just above the lock, and yet ten minutes more to the church ferry at the bottom of Isleworth eyot. Above the lock there are always anglers, but I have never yet seen one of them actually catch anything at the time of my passing. From below it one can see the weir, the only one on the

Thames which has not moved in me the desire of trout. At low water, however, it looks as if it ought to hold one or two, and there certainly are trout in the reach, though systematic trout-fishing does not seem to go on there. I remember once seeing a big trout feed at the head of the eyot, but whether he is still in existence I know not. Almost any day at low water, however, below the eyot there are alarms and excursions to be seen among the dace, which argue fish of prey of considerable size, trout probably. Occasionally, too, a trout is caught by a dace-fisher, but it is usually a small one.

Arrived at the ferry, it is well to cross over and fish on the other side, and the knowing among the *habitués* make their way down for a third of a mile or perhaps rather more to the point where the river is shallowest, just above a slight but recognizable bend in the stream. Here, they say, are the biggest dace, the six-ounce fish, which, when caught, are to be found at the top in each man's basket, like half-pound trout in Devonshire. But I should say that there is a fair sprinkling of these big dace all the way down, the difficulty being to catch them. Some men hold by big flies, coachmen, black gnats, yellow duns, etc., on No. 1 or even No. 2 hooks being considered about right, and more than once I have been tempted to the same opinion. Lately, however, the big fly has not served me well. On my last visit nothing but a black spider on 000 hook would do any good. That afternoon also upset another theory, or, rather, taught me something new. My belief had been that you could catch the Isleworth dace in two ways—one with the dry or semi-dry fly,

in which case the fish usually took it on the drop or "half volley," as some authority puts it, or wet and drawn along more or less rapidly under water. For a while they confirmed me in this belief, and I caught several with the dry fly, while I missed a good many in the other way. Then they ceased to come up to it at all, either wet or dry, until I accidentally got a rise in recovering the fly as it floated. This led to experiments, and I found that, by letting the fly fall dry and then dragging it for a few inches along the surface, I got plenty of rises, and pretty bold ones too. The fish came at it before it had gone six inches or not at all, and for an hour I had quite a brisk bit of sport, so much so that on reaching the ferry I did not hesitate to estimate the number of fish kept as three dozen. I was really surprised, on counting tails afterwards, to find that there were only a dozen and a half. It had seemed to me that for a time I was catching them as fast as I could. Three dozen would be a very fair basket for a good day, though takes of eight or ten dozen are made once in a way. Six inches is the size limit, and the majority of fish caught are about seven. If your three dozen average three ounces apiece, you have done very well indeed, and if you have three or four six-ounce fish you may be proud. There are plenty of these big ones in the water, but they are difficult to tempt.

It is worth while catching a dish of these little dace, if only for the pleasure of looking at them afterwards. They make a brave silvery show when laid side by side, and though individually at time of capture they have not the looks of brook trout, collectively in the

evening they have the advantage. Brook trout lose their gold, but dace preserve their silver. One good angler informed me (rather apologetically) that he proposed to have his catch to breakfast. No apology was needed, for, bones admitted and extracted, dace are good meat—as good as many trout.

But dace are not the whole of Isleworth fishing. There is the daily wonder of the great river shrinking away so that a man may go dry-foot (or practically so) along its gravel bed, and see only a clear, shallow stream where a few hours back was a deep, turbid flood; there is the awful pleasure of imagining what would happen if one were caught suddenly by the turn of the tide, for one is so low down in the world that it seems wellnigh impossible to climb up that steep bank through the mud to the grounds of Zion House; there is the wonderful solitude almost within sound of London—a small human figure or so up at the ferry, perhaps, and about the brown-sailed barges at the distant quay, but for the rest no sign of life except a gull or two wheeling round, some rooks exploring the naked river-bed, and the dace dimpling the surface of the quiet stream.

Then, when the tide has turned (and may you be not too far from the ferry when that happens!), there is a late tea at the London Apprentice, the quaint old inn near the church. The view from its billiard-room window up stream and down is alone worth the journey. After it there is the return in the ferry-boat, with a long backward look at the riverside street and the old church beneath their canopy of crimson sky; the meditative walk back along the towpath under the

great trees, almost each one sheltering its couple of shy lovers who are making believe that the world is as they would have it be; the crossing of the old green, with its circle of fair dwellings; and lastly, the extraordinary blaze of light as one gets to the corner of the green and looks up towards the town. This is a fitting end to a day of impressions that one does not easily forget.

IV—THE ANGLER'S TEMPER

SOME of the old writers were more diffuse on the mental and moral qualities necessary to successful angling than are the authors of to-day, perhaps because discussion of those things was then more in fashion. But there is plenty of scope for the modern angler to meditate on such abstract matters as faith, hope, and charity in connection with his pastime; the mutability of things, the why and the how—philosophical speculation undoubtedly has its place in angling. Most absorbing, perhaps, are the mental processes of the angler in the course of any given day's fishing. His temper, for example, is in itself material for lifelong study. What event or series of events is most trying to it? When lost, how is it recovered? How, in the name of all that is wonderful, does it come about that sometimes it is not lost? What happens to the angler and his fishing when it has been thoroughly lost? Is loss of temper a contagious malady, communicable, perhaps, through long rows of fishermen in a monster competition? Is an oath sworn in tribulation necessarily binding?

One might easily fill a book with questions bearing on this topic, and several other books with answers

and commentary, but here they would be out of place, and the subject can only be considered on broad lines. Illustration, too, must of necessity be somewhat limited, since one only possesses one temper, and observation of other people's tempers is hampered by their extreme reticence concerning the same. Very rarely shall you hear a brother angler confess that he is there and then without his temper. Afterwards perhaps he will let fall a casual remark to the effect that he momentarily lost patience with the barbed wire, and if you are wise you will let it go at that. There is no need to recapitulate the things you heard him say—it would not be kind; and, besides, next time it may be your turn to need tactful treatment. Barbed wire is no respecter of persons.

It has seemed to me sometimes that there is a decided difference between loss of temper and another frame of mind which is closely allied to it and might be mistaken for it—despair. The first is commonly the result of small woes, the second of grave misfortunes. Possibly by a cumulative process a succession of small woes may amount to grave misfortunes, in which case loss of temper may end in the more dignified emotion. But I am not sure as to this; Fate has a way of dealing the little blows and big ones with different hands, and of using one hand to-day and the other to-morrow. On the day of small woes nothing of any magnitude happens at all—indeed, the fact amounts to another little woe all by itself; on the other day you get catastrophes one after the other, any one of which would be enough to stagger you; you are overwhelmed with tribulation. Yet such a day is the

better of the two; you have at any rate lived through stirring times.

Take the day of small troubles, and what does it amount to? To begin with, there is a mean sort of wind which is neither frankly behind nor boldly before, an underhand wind slinking round corners. You see a trout rising under your own bank. You sit down before him and begin. The first cast has not strength enough, and the abominable breeze curls the fly back. Into the second cast you put more force to counteract the enemy, which, seeing your intention, stops suddenly; the fly falls with a "splosh," and the trout is put down.

The next trouble is when the wind gets behind you and makes the fly catch in the rod-top at the forward cast; the crack it makes is in itself an exasperation, and wiping grease off the fine gut point which has been in contact with the running-line is a horrid process. You fear all things: the point may be weakened by the crack, it will be frayed by the wiping, the grease will not come off, you must put on a new point. You do so, and then two casts afterwards the wind plays the same trick again. After this you get caught up in herbage and have to disentangle the gut laboriously from tough obstructions. It is frayed, and a third point is required. Then you get caught up again. This time you pull, first gently, then viciously. Something breaks, and, a little ashamed of yourself, you go in contrition to look for the fly, which, of course, is not to be found. A new point, new fly, and good resolutions. But the point was not soaked enough, and a few seconds later there is a crack in the air, and

you have to repair damages once more. After this you put your right foot into a hole and the water gets into your boot. Next you get your first rise, and miss the fish.

Troubles follow apace on this. More fish are missed, more flies are cracked off in the air or pulled off in the thistles; trout which to distant view seemed to be rising fearlessly are put down by the most stealthy approach; that accomplished but somewhat critical angler, Major X., comes up just as you are about to cover a fish rising under the opposite bank. He watches your struggles against the wind, which has taken this opportunity to veer right round, for a while in silence. Then he says, "You want to try the downward cut—like this." Downward cut! After such a morning as you have been having! The only possible answer is to wind up your line and observe that the cast is too much for you, in a nonchalant tone which implies that, while you could, of course, manage any other on the river, this happens to be your one weak spot. You then invite the Major to try his hand, not without malice, and at the first cast his fly falls beautifully and he catches the fish, bringing his score up to a brace and a half. It is too much: with a very cursory farewell, you go off downstream, and as you get over the stile at the bend, you look back and see that the Major is already fast in another. You shake your head gloomily, and make up your mind that he is little better than a pot-hunter.

At the road bridge, whither you have made your way in the hope of a trout from the ripple under the middle arch, more trials are in store for you. A small boy

springs up from nowhere to vex your soul by looking over the bridge and informing you that there is "a big un" down there. Of course there is. It is always there. It was there before the small boy was born, and you were trying for it then, too. It is possible to ignore the small boy, but your casting is erratic and irritable. Then a girl and an athletic young fellow come along the road, and of course stop to watch you. She says something of which you can distinguish two words, "fishing . . . patience," and he smiles in a superior manner. Really, the ignorance and folly of people is almost past bearing. You might forgive the girl the injury she is doing you by waving her white sunshade above your fish, but when she insults you as well you yearn for vengeance. You utter a silent prayer that she may marry that very objectionable young man and be smiled at like that across the breakfast-table. Meanwhile, you go on doggedly trying to put your fly where you want it—over the nose of the big trout. After many futile efforts you unexpectedly succeed; there is a rise, a boil, a glimpse of a broad yellow side turning in the water, a momentary thrill from the rod-top, and your fly comes back to you. Yes, of course, the point of the hook is gone, knocked off by being dashed against the bridge. You might have known that it would be so. "'E's lost 'im," announces the small boy cheerfully, as one who has made a pleasing discovery.

So it goes on all day, and towards sunset, when, somewhat refreshed and strengthened by a cup of tea, you are hopefully awaiting the evening rise, a finish is added to the day's proceedings by a blanket of white mist,

which envelops the river and its banks, effectually putting an end to your fishing. It is difficult to see how the angler can avoid losing his temper after such a day, or how he is to be blamed if he favours the landscape with some observations on the general subject of fishing. In that very amusing book, "Folly and Fresh Air," which is not so well known to anglers as it ought to be, Mr. Eden Phillpotts has described a day of angling misfortunes, and his hero's summing up is worth quoting:

"I pitched the loathsome rod on the ground, sat down on a tree-stump, and let Providence have it hot and strong from a lacerated soul. I said:

"'What the Foul Fiend have I done that I should be plagued like this? What crime have I committed? It is monstrous, it is unfair, it is wrong. I've had enough to break my heart twenty times over to-day, and I won't stand it. I'll go back to town to-morrow, and write a book that shall ruin this place; I'll blast the reputation of Dartmoor and everything on Dartmoor. I'll warn sportsmen away, and wreck these streams; and I'm lost hereafter if I ever fish again for trout as long as I live.'"

With such small alterations as should be necessary for geographical accuracy, these moving words might well be committed to memory. It is not given to everyone to find speech for himself when it is sorely needed, and I have known days on which I personally should have been immensely relieved if I could have remembered this admirable commination in its entirety. There is a completeness about it which satisfies one's yearnings. Of course, the most desirable thing in con-

nection with temper is its perpetual safe preservation; but as to infirm human anglers this is a manifest impossibility, one has to be content with something less. I dare to hope that putting the matter into words and speaking one's mind after the manner suggested will not be counted against one overmuch.

V—SOME KENNET DAYS

OF all the South-Country streams which I have fished I think my warmest affections are given to the Kennet. This is not so much on account of the sport which it has given me as of the sport which it might some day yield. The Kennet in the first week of June holds one almost breathless with exciting promises, and its trout, in the lower parts, are surely the largest offered for capture by any river that gives the fly-fisher a chance. As yet no Kennet monster has come my way, but the fact that I know by sight several fish verging on ten pounds is enough to keep me expectant every succeeding Mayfly season. To me also it is an attraction that the river is not purely a trout water. Grayling, chub, dace, perch, roach, and pike, all have their fascination, especially when one knows that all run big. I should say that the collector of "specimens" would have a better chance of getting trophies from the Kennet than from any river, except, perhaps, the Hampshire Avon. But he would need patience and luck as well as skill. It is not on every day that the fish can be got to feed.

I have fished the river for a good many years now without often getting any sport worth mentioning, but

I have had occasional days to be marked with a white stone. Three of them in particular, all enjoyed on the same fishery, which lies midway between Hungerford and Newbury, have induced deep gratitude in a mind not unduly spoilt by good fortune. The first came opportunely after very trying times—times of—but no! this chapter is triumphant.

It was a windy, sunny day in August when I reached the little cart bridge which spans the water in the middle of the fishery. My mind was set on dace—fish for which this part of the Kennet is famous—and a fly-rod was in my hand. Ambition held me in its clutches; a dace weighing a pound or more was its object. Such dace in most rivers are inconceivable, but here they were a possibility; they had been caught in the past, so why should they not also brighten the future? Besides dace, there were grayling to be thought of, and it was, indeed, grayling which insisted on notice first.

Above the bridge is a shallow, a perfectly clear stretch of gravel, on which almost every fish is visible thirty yards away or more. The three big trout which occasionally come out from under the bridge and cruise round were not there, but one long dark shape in the middle of the river twenty-five yards off attracted attention. At first I thought it might be one of the three, but after making out several other rather smaller shapes near it, I came to the conclusion that it must be a grayling, and a big one. Having waders on, I decided to get in behind the shoal and attack them with a short line. The water was deeper than it looked, and when I got to within about four yards of the fish it was nearly up to the top of the waders. This, however, was an

advantage in one respect: the grayling took no alarm at my proximity, and I was able to watch their every movement, except when the violent upstream wind ruffled the water too much. There were about a dozen in the shoal, ranging from some three-quarters of a pound up to the big one, who looked a good two and a half pounds.

I began the attack with a oo double-hooked Wickham. The big one tilted his head at it once, and none of the others would look at it. Then it was changed for a little fly with red quill body and badger hackle, also on double hooks. The patriarch came right up to inspect this, as did two or three others; but all shook their heads and tails and went down again. After several casts I tried letting the fly sink and float down under water. I could not see it now, but I could see the fish coming up to look at it just in the same way. At last it seemed to me that one of them opened his mouth and shut it again. I tightened; the grayling turned in the water and was on. Playing him gently downstream, I retreated backwards, and eventually got him into the net and to the bank without disturbing the others—a pounder with a beautiful sheen of salmon pink over his silver. After he had been placed in the creel on a bed of grass the attack was resumed. But the little fly had lost its attractions, and was changed for a Brunton's fancy on a oo single hook. This brought the big grayling up like a shot, and I made sure that he meant to have it. But no: down he went again, after a perceptible moment of indecision. At the next cast he did have it fairly, but somehow the strike missed him, and he went down again unpricked.

The other grayling would not take it, though several of them came and inspected it. Then I suffered it to sink and tried it under water. Again the big fish took it, and again I missed him. With another I had better luck, and after a brisk fight got him to the bank —one pound six ounces. But I could not get a third, though the fish, one or other of them, would inspect the fly every time it came down. Also the wind got worse, and it was more difficult to see what was going on. At last I gave it up and went down to the shallow below the bridge, where I knew another shoal had its home. Here the wind was very bad, and I could not see the fish at all, though an occasional rise showed me where they were. Fished dry, Brunton's fancy produced three short rises, and fished wet accidentally one fish. I can take no credit for him, as I found he was on when I attempted to recover the line. Though he was no bigger than the first, he gave a splendid fight, and was netted with difficulty as the fly came away.

After this the wind got worse and worse, and I gave up grayling fishing as a bad job. A worm used on Stewart tackle in a hole at the bottom of the fishery on the chance of a perch would be less of a tax on the temper, and scarcely less remunerative than the dry fly. So after lunch I sat waiting for the perch to begin for pretty well three hours. One bite only rewarded my patience, and a gleam of silver as the light fly-rod bent to the strike showed that the biter was no perch. It proved to be a beautiful dace, which brought the spring balance fairly down to the one-pound mark. Such a reward was worth all the patience of waiting.

At last, as no more bites came, and as the wind was

decreasing a little, I put on the fly-cast again, and began to fish under the other bank, where I had seen an occasional ring. It proved that there was a shoal of dace there, and for nearly an hour I wasted excellent opportunities. The wind was still gusty and unpleasant, blowing right in my teeth, and three casts out of four were futile. The fourth usually got a rise, and I usually missed the fish, or pricked and lost him. I finished about 6 p.m. with six dace, running from ten ounces to thirteen ounces, whereas I ought to have had at least twice as many.

There still remained one more incident of the day, and that the most important. I was strolling homewards, thinking all was over, as it had turned very cold, when I saw a rise on a shallow outside some rushes. I cast idly at it, and hooked the fish. Imagining that it must be a little one, I essayed to haul it ashore. But it would not be hauled, and went off downstream. Then it rolled, and I saw its depth of silver. With a gasp, I changed my tactics and played it with the most anxious care. I confess that I did not deserve the fortune, but the fish was safely landed—a noble dace of one pound two and a half ounces. I do not expect ever to get one bigger, and I am thankful to say that, with the other pounder, he reached the taxidermist safely. Together in a glass case they now remain a memorial of a glorious occasion.

The next day may just be mentioned as a curiosity. The fishing was a brief affair, or rather the sport was. I reached the water about 10 a.m. By twenty minutes past I had landed the big grayling and two of his brothers, and, except for three or four little dace, I

did not get another fish all day. The big grayling seriously disappointed me when I got him on to the spring balance, as he just failed to touch the two-pound mark. But in the water he was all that fancy painted. On 5X gut and a lissome six-ounce rod he gave magnificent sport, and it must have been nearly five minutes before he was in the net. There was one moment of the combat—when he was within two yards of the bridge, and I was holding at all risks—in which I credited him with three pounds. To me grayling always look bigger in the water than they are, whereas trout generally seem smaller. But I was glad to get him, though he was below the estimate. He took, as did the others, Brunton's fancy fished wet in the manner described. There is no better grayling fly, and I do not think there is a better way of using it, where one can get behind one's fish and watch them. Unless the fish is in sight, a rise under water in sluggish streams is very difficult to detect. One can seldom feel it as one can in a quick stream. When the line is seen to stop it is usually too late to strike.

The second white-stone day I owe to my good friend Hyandry. The story which he related to me was frankly incredible, and I told him so. He had, he asserted, visited the fishery on Easter Monday, and had the remarkable experience of finding the big Kennet trout rising whole-heartedly at small flies, olives, and trifles of that sort. He hooked, he said, no less than four of the real old stagers, besides the smaller fry of about a pound, which do not really count as Kennet fish. I knew all about those trout, for in the year when I got the big dace I fished for them

assiduously, and convinced myself that, except during the Mayfly season, the big ones would rise at nothing whatsoever, unless it might be at great sedges in the twilight of the long summer evenings. Even while the Mayfly was on my efforts among the monsters were conspicuously unsuccessful—a fish of about two and a half pounds was the biggest I was able to secure. I had, indeed, seen fish heavier—much heavier—but they mostly stood on their heads and waved their tails in the air, supremely indifferent to surface-food and dry-fly anglers alike. My season on the fishery made me profoundly sceptical as to its uses as a dry-fly water, except during the first half of June. Therefore, when Hyandry told tales of three-pounders feeding steadily on olives in April, I said that I should much like to see those marvels for myself—or, in other words, that he lied.

He had, moreover, had reverses, a circumstance which often stimulates incredulity. One monster, for example, ran with super-piscine swiftness downstream, doubled, jumped, and got off; another reversed these tactics, making upstream to begin with, but equally getting off. A third—I forget what it did, but it looked like a five-pounder, and got off. The fourth—and here we come to the curious part of the story—did not get off. It was played with consummate skill (Hyandry knows his business; has he not captured vast sea trout with the dry fly?), landed, and brought home in triumph. It weighed two pounds fourteen ounces, and was seen by credible persons. This fact certainly lent some colour to my friend's assertions. There, he could demonstrate with calm simplicity, was the fish.

On second thoughts, I had to retract what I had said about not believing him, and to admit that what he said had happened had in effect happened. But, I urged, he had stumbled on that unique occasion which is called "once in a blue moon." Never, never would he come upon the like again. Hyandry admitted that this might be so, did not profess to explain the phenomena, and thereafter kept silence. But though silent, he was not idle, and to his good offices I attribute an invitation which reached me for a day on the water during the next week-end—a day in which I might be able to see whether Bank Holiday had been exceptional or not, and to find out whether the big trout in that part of the Kennet do take small fly in April otherwise than once in a blue moon.

I could not have had a pleasanter day for the investigation—warm, with a soft westerly breeze just strong enough to help in a long cast, and with an April shower or so to suit the season. The water, when, at about 9 a.m., I stood on the well-remembered wooden bridge gazing down the long, bright shallow, looked clear and delightful, while the birds, for which the estate is famous, sang lustily, as on such a day they should. Altogether it was vastly satisfactory to be abroad whether the big trout rose or whether they did not, and I blessed my friend for procuring the chance for me. Then I saw a fly, a medium olive, and soon afterwards I became aware of rises some little way downstream, also of commotions. Hurrying down to look, I found that the rises were due to several small trout, the commotions to big grayling, which had evidently just spawned or were about to spawn. No

trout of consequence, so far as I could see, was on the move, but the hatch of fly was only just beginning. In any case, I was not minded to stay by the shallow, but to go down to the bottom of the water to a favourite spot of mine of old, where I had been much tantalized by the sight of big trout, generally tailing, sometimes minnowing, but never rising, even in the Mayfly time. For some reason very few Mayflies hatched at this point—never enough to make the trout rise—though higher up the hatch might be very great.

I covered the half-mile quickly, but not too soon, for the hatch was in full swing when I got to the weed-rack, which is almost at the bottom of the water. And not only was fly coming down—fish were coming up under the camp-sheathing opposite. One in particular attracted my eye, and as I watched it I mentally grovelled before Hyandry. What he had said was absolutely true, and here were the big Kennet fish doing it again; it was not even a case of a blue moon. I then became excited and nervous. I am not accustomed to seeing big fish feeding like that in April. Moreover, the place was the last but one in the world which one would choose for an encounter with anything over a pound on such tackle as one employs for small dry flies. The river is about twenty yards broad. The weed-rack, a pretty solid structure of piles and wire, known as the "Stop," is shaped like a wedge, with its point upstream and in the middle of the river, and so its sides slope away to the banks, forming acute angles with the camp-sheathing. A fish hooked anywhere near the rack is morally certain to run down into the angle, and there to destroy the tackle at

leisure. In fact, I discovered that such a misfortune had happened to an angler the day before, and that he had lost both fly and trout. Conscious of the difficulties of the place, but more conscious of the trout feeding, I began excitedly. He was rising only a little above the point of the weed-rack, and I had to cast slightly downstream to cover him without drag.

The first fly was a medium olive quill on a oo hook, and he bulged at it twice. Then he took it, and, horror! I felt that he was pricked and missed, entirely by my own fault, for I struck too soon. I could have kicked myself, and was abusing my folly, when up he came again as eager as ever. A change of fly might still save the situation. This time it was a medium olive dun on a o hook, and he took it fair and square the first time it came over him. I now realized to the full the nature of the place, for he went irresistibly downstream, while I hurried up to get the line clear of the posts. Between us we made the reel scream, and I was sure that I should never see the fish any closer. But mercifully a memory came to me of previous fights in which guile had triumphed over force. Instead of trying to hold the fish, I slackened pressure until the line was no more than a light rein on him, and he stopped within a foot of the lowest post, and began to think it over. It took a longish time, but foot by foot he was coaxed upstream until he was clear of the weed-rack altogether, and was swimming meditatively about in front of me. Then something—perhaps the sight of the net, which I was getting ready—started him off again, and he once more went helter-skelter for the weed-rack, this time

in the angle at my own side. Here matters were complicated by a wire stretched across from the bank to the post in the middle of the river. This prevented my following, so the fight was all to begin over again. A repetition of the coaxing tactics was ultimately successful, and in the end he came to the net and was mine own. The spring balance made him out three and a half pounds—a long, thin fish, which ought to have weighed quite four pounds. But I was not disposed to be critical. A fish of that size had not often come my way to the dry fly—in April never.

Two other trout fed within a few yards of where the first was hooked. One rose, was missed, and went down. The other was in a quite inaccessible place in the farthest corner of the angle, the one spot in the world worse than that of my fight. To reach it one had to cast over the side of the weed-rack, with the certain knowledge that breaking was inevitable if the fish was hooked. I left a fly in the weed-rack and gave it up, yielding the fish to a brother angler who had just arrived. I thought mine had been a pretty good fight, but it pales into insignificance beside the one he had afterwards. For, casting over the piles and wire, he hooked the trout. It ran upstream for a wonder, and he had hopes. But his line caught on one of the posts, and he could not get it clear. After waiting some time, with the fish tugging away thirty yards upstream, he decided on a desperate remedy. Twenty-five yards below the weed-rack is a railway-bridge. Paying off line, he retreated to the bridge, climbed up on to it, and, getting a straight pull, freed his line. And then the fish, now some seventy yards

above him, and still going strong, gave a plunge, and the fly came away. It was a mighty contest, and about the last event of the day, for the hatch of fly was over by eleven, and the big fish all retired. But Hyandry was right. Personally, I am very glad of it.

The third great day was vouchsafed to me in the following August, when I was again privileged to visit the water. It was very hot—so hot that I found myself wishing for coolness so early as eight o'clock. I had been out since before six, curious to see whether there would in real summer be an early morning rise. There was not, and clearly there would be none till the late evening, when the sedges come out.

On the way back to breakfast I threw out a suggestion to the keeper about worms and perch at the Stop. The Stop is the rather complicated affair for catching weeds described earlier, and is built of wire and piles. Round about it is the deepest water in the fishery, and round about it too were, I had been told, perch and—this I knew from ocular proof—roach. My notion was to sit there as on previous occasions, unsuccessful of course, but placid and relatively cool. The keeper was doubtful about the perch, but optimistic about worms. No; no gentleman had left any behind for the public good, but he dared say he could find some himself. Thereupon I went in to breakfast, reflecting that, with the worms that he would dig, the bread that should be levied from the table, and the caddises that I would collect from a ditch, the bait problem was solved. For the tackle I had my light ten-foot fly-rod, reel and gut, and friend C., who has more gear of all kinds than anyone else on earth, would surely lend me hooks and

lead. This he did, and I started out again after breakfast possessed of three roach-hooks and some lead wire.

It is a longish tramp to the Stop, especially if one goes by way of the ditch, and when I got there I was both heated and caddis-less. Not one caddis had I been able to find, so all was up with the roach-fishing. Though I had duly acquired bread, I knew from experience that the roach in that water will not take it at all in August, probably from unfamiliarity with it. A course of ground-baiting might educate them. There remained, therefore, but the worms and perch. Presently, after manœuvring the punt, providentially left there by the weed-cutters, to the position I wanted, I rigged up the tackle, a cast tapering to 3X, with a bit of lead wire wrapped round it, and one of the roach-hooks at the end. And then I opened the worm-tin.

There is room for a treatise on angle-worms, as the Americans call them, and one of its chapters should be entited "Worms and the Lay Mind." The angler asks for worms. The word "worms" has to him a special significance. It implies good measure, brimming over, a supply large enough to serve the hook all day, and to meet besides the necessities of occasional moderate ground-baiting, just to keep the fish alert. The lay mind, on the other hand, interprets it to mean three worms and a large white grub, thrown in with the idea that "any old thing" is, piscatorially considered, a worm. I found my tin slightly better furnished—three small lobs, five assorted worms of the smallest size, and one fragment—but the supply

was little enough for a morning's fishing, supposing the perch to be there and in the mood.

For a time it looked as though even this meagre stock would be too much. The Stop, as has been said, has two arms forming a wedge upstream; the punt, tied to the top post, lay along the right arm, and I fished over the posts in the **V** on the downstream side. The worm lay on the bottom, in about six feet of water. Nothing happened, so after a time I began to draw it about and fish all the clear water within reach—not very much, because the weeds were thick below—in the sink-and-draw fashion attractive to perch. Still nothing happened, but at last there came a striped shadow just as I was about to lift the worm out. I checked my hand, he had it at once, and was presently lost to sight and burrowing among the posts and driftweed apparently right under the punt. A steady strain brought him out, but he bolted back two or three times before the net could come into action. At last it got him, however, an honest pounder, and the worm, blown up the gut, was still intact.

After another spell of inaction, I dropped the worm in upstream of the Stop beyond the other arm, so that the rod-point projected over both rows of posts. Some care had to be exercised that the strongish current might not sweep the hook into the posts and cause disaster. Soon I felt a slow, dragging sort of bite, struck, and was battling with another fish with a similar taste for weeds and posts. It was some minutes before I even saw it, and all I could do was to hold on. The lissome fly-rod helped as it played to the fish's movements, and so saved the light gut from a smash. At last the fish was coaxed away from

the piles, worked upstream, and eventually netted—a roach of one and a half pounds, which proved to be hooked in a fin and not in the mouth. Soon afterwards in the same place something else was hooked which at once bolted through the far arm of the Stop between two posts and under the wire, and plunged into the near arm at my feet, where it remained immovable. I could do nothing but hang on and trust to luck, since the wire was between me and the rod-point and the line beneath it. At last the fish yielded to the strain and came out, now visible as a fine perch, and not a trout, as I had at first feared. Executing a strategic movement with the net, I got him just as he was meditating a turn round one of the posts—one and a half pounds.

The fine gut was now frayed pretty well to tatters, so I put on a rather stronger cast, stripping a fly to serve as hook, and tried forcible restraint with the next fish. The light seven-ounce rod was bent nearly double, but the perch never got into danger, and was netted—another pounder. Then came a fourth, a little heavier, and afterwards I hooked a bigger one. It followed the instant strain quietly enough till it was clear of the obstructions, but then it realized its situation, and dashed down on my side of the Stop and under the punt, dragging the rod-point deep into the water. I have seldom had such a fight, even with a trout, and more than once I feared for the rod. It was a relief when at last the meshes of the net received what I felt sure was a two and a half pounder. As a matter of fact, it was just short of two pounds. This fish had exhausted the last of the worms, so perch-fishing seemed at an end. But a peep into the interior of the punt well revealed three minnows left there by some

other angler. One of these tempted a last fish to my basket, a three-quarter pounder, and the smallest of the three brace. That was the end of it. I made an effort to catch sundry large roach which occasionally swam into view, but, beyond two nibbles at a bit of silkweed, got no response, and eventually departed for a very late luncheon with my seven fish, weighing nearly ten pounds. Such a basket does not often come my way in these hard times.

But the day was not yet over, and more pleasure was in reserve. About 6 p.m. I wandered out again, armed with my biggest fly-rod, a powerful split-cane of eleven feet three inches, and ready for the evening rise. It did not begin till after eight, and then the big trout began to rove about, making great waves on the shallows. But they only came up once or twice apiece, and in the splashy way which does not mean business. One splash, however, was close to my own bank, in a likely corner, and I waited below the spot in case the fish should come on to rise properly. In due course he did so; after trying several patterns I got a head-and-tail rise at a sedge, and then we raced downstream together for quite one hundred and fifty yards, with intervals of leaps and cross-rushes on the fish's part. With the exception of one big fish at Blagdon, I have never had a trout on which was so suggestive of a wild salmon; the failing light and powerful rod helped the illusion. When eventually he was out and on the bank, it transpired that he, like the roach of the morning, was hooked in the pectoral fin. He weighed three pounds six ounces, and made a grand finish to what in the circumstances I shall always regard as one of the most delightful days I have ever had.

VI—DRY-FLY MEDITATIONS

I. The Day of Reckoning

APRIL is almost upon us, and it is time to prepare for the beginning. I say this without prejudice to the fact that it was time six weeks or more ago. There are methodical anglers who seized it then by the forelock, but these words are not intended for them. They are addressed to the weaker brethren—those who let "I dare not" wait upon "I will"; those who hold that "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof"; those who, like myself, have skeletons in their tackle cupboards. In the words of the song, "Let us all be unhappy together," for now is our day of reckoning. There is no doubt that the methodical ones have the better of us; we do not often admit it, because your man of method is a vexatious being at times, and is curious about many matters of trifling importance, such as punctuality for dinner and the disposition of effects in the sitting-room which you share with him at the fishing inn. He has been known to remove your reel, with an expression of dumb suffering, from the breakfast-table to the mantelpiece; he also has prejudices about boots and slippers, and on arrival he always spends in unpacking a valuable half-hour which

could have been devoted to immediate angling. These things, however, are by the way, and at this moment he is, without cavil or question, our superior, for he is ready, and can await the opening day with a calm mind.

For the rest of us all is now fret and fever. Our rod, it is suddenly discovered, is by no means fit for service. Its whippings have begun to go, its varnish is chipped, its end-rings are worn into grooves bad enough to ruin the dressing of that new line which has to be bought and put on to the reel after it has been cleaned and put in order. Can the tackle-maker effect the necessary repairs by the last day of March at latest? The question is asked in a shamefaced way, because we know that the demand is not reasonable, and that we ought to have looked into the matter in January; and when he replies vaguely, alleging the press of similar work which occupies all hands, the length of time which varnish takes in drying, and other things, as obstacles to a definite promise, we leave the matter in his hands with a shrug of resignation, or else decide that the rod must go through one more season unrepaired. In that case we shall suffer for it, as was foreseen, and probably shall, after all, have to send it into hospital just before the Mayfly season or the annual holiday, or at some other time of special inconvenience; and in either case one result will probably be a new rod, bought as a temporary substitute for the old favourite. More than once, I grieve to confess, have I been betrayed into such wanton extravagance in this way. Of subsequent developments there is no end, for the new rod requires a special line to suit it, probably a new reel, and then very likely

spoils our holiday by refusing to fall in with our ways. At any rate, if we do not get all the sport we expected —than which nothing is more probable—we shall explain the fact by adverse comments on "the new rod."

Rod, reel, and line are, unfortunately, not the whole of it. There are many other matters which require attention. The landing-net, for instance, seems to have occupied the winter in breaking its meshes, and now displays four or five well-developed holes. But for the merest accident these might have been overlooked, and so might the very insecure condition of the knuckle-joint. Even as it is, we know not when we may see the net again, once it has joined rod and reel in the repairer's hands. So there will very likely be a new net inscribed on that "little account." The oil-bottle (really, oil-bottles one way and another are the plague of a fisherman's life) is lost. It may be somewhere or it may not, and it is safer to assume that it will not turn up before April. *Item*, a new oil-bottle. The spring balance is, alack! all rusty, as well it may be, for, now one comes to remember, it fell into the river on the last day of last season, and was only rescued with difficulty. The mishap was clean forgotten, and no steps were taken to prevent mischief ensuing. Now arises the question, Can one trust a rusty balance? No; a new one is essential. A search for or examination of other small necessaries, such as tweezers, dampers, and the like, leads one on to repetition of the same melancholy determination, and then one turns gloomily to the gut and flies.

At the beginning of a recent season I devised a very crafty scheme. Inability to say whether any given

strand of gut was thicker or finer than any other (except in the case of salmon and drawn gut) has long been a grave trouble to me, so I determined to strain my eyes no more, but to throw the responsibility on the merchants of gut. Therefore I laid in a stock of picked hanks, making the dealer label each in a large round hand, so that, should I by chance be found fishing with a cast tapering the wrong way, the blame should not rest with me. The scheme, I submit, was a sound one, but what is to be done now that all the labels have apparently been torn off, and all the different sizes of gut mixed up at various moments of excitement during fishing? The expense of repeating those hanks will be prodigious, but I see no other remedy. Disentanglement and re-labelling of the old stock would be too much for anyone. I hope no other anglers are in such a predicament, but I fear it is a fond hope.

In any case most of us will have the fly trouble in common. The way flies will get into the wrong places, both in book and box, is almost past bearing. There are, I see, many hours of patient labour before me in sorting my scattered collection. Some of them have wandered away into matchboxes, cardboard minnow boxes, and other irregular places from which they must be retrieved. Then there is the question of the half-used fly. Take that medium olive; it is a bit draggled, yet not so bad but it might be worse. Probably it has never yet caught a fish, though it has covered a few. Is it too battered for further service? It might come in, perhaps, some day when the fish are well on. Will the fish ever be well on, and, granting that they will

not, would one ever put such a fly on first? It is a difficult problem, and the worry of it helps to make the rest of the fly question unendurable. There is one way out—a complete new set of the indispensable flies arranged in a new box by the tackle-maker.

In the abstract the approach of the trout season is a thing full of holy joy, and we all freely admit that we are glad of it. Yet it brings its troubles to us weaker brethren. I have serious thoughts of becoming a man of method—after this year.

2. April

There are two Aprils. There is an April of dream and delight, when a warm sun alternates with soft showers, when a man can actually see the young green things growing apace, when the water-meadows seem fair meads refreshed by rills of Paradise, and when the trout rise steadily from mid-morning until tea-time. Then a man may angle with confidence, secure in hooks of practical size and gut of sensible texture, for at the beginning of the ideal season fish are bold feeders. Winter has been a time of sleep and of forgetting, and they hold no painfully acquired theories about gossamer points or microscopic flies. At the beginning of his education a child accepts the false as readily as the true, and so the trout. So also the angler, and hence this suggestion of an April day, of which all men must have had experience—in December reverie. Possibly some few, far back in their lives, may have met with it in its right place; I remember a single glorious basket of five and a half brace, good fish

all, which once made a perfect April day unforgettable for me. But it is years ago, and my business is with the present and the other Aprils that disgrace it.

On Monday I awoke to the intelligence (gleaned from a halfpenny journal) that an earthquake had shaken the fisheries to their foundations. It had been likened, in some Northern town, to the "sound of an approaching motor-car," and in the South was thought to be a sufficient explanation of recent sluggishness in the Itchen trout. Coming events cast their shadows before, and several excellent anglers were vexed thereby. But now that the phenomenon was passed and over doubtless all would be well, and the wind might be less violent. In this sanguine temper we drove to the water, assuring one another that the breeze which met us was only the slight disturbance of air natural to higher ground, and that the river valley would be unprofaned by rude zephyrs. More or less we kept this fiction up until we stood in a row on the river bank, clutching our hats, and buttoning up our coats against Euroclydon. Then we said no more and parted. About half-past eleven I stood in an orchard at the corner of a copse, and there saw the first rise. I put on a fly—tup's indispensable—and essayed to cover the fish, cutting upstream across the wind in masterly fashion. I suppose I was a little too masterly, for the fly sought shelter in a sturdy young oak and found it. My season on the Itchen had now definitely begun in the usual manner, and I left tup where he was, replacing him by a hare's ear. The fish rose again, and I rapidly lengthened line to cover him until the hare's ear reached the self-same oak, and my cast came back

without its point. I repaired damages, put on a medium olive, and took the utmost precaution to avoid hitting the copse any more, with the result that the olive got doubled up by the wind, cracked off, and flew into space.

I then decided that the orchard was not a good place, and went away downstream to look for a better. At last I came to a spot where the stream widened out, flowing deep and rather quiet under my own bank, on which were three little bushes, and just outside each bush a fish was feeding. Here the wind promised to be helpful, so I hurriedly put on another tup and cast at the lowest trout. But the wind helped too much; line and fly fell in with a heavy splash, and the fish went down. Number two went down in the same way. Number three, however, was covered properly, rose, plunged, and was gone. Then I examined the fly, and found that it had neither point nor barb, a fact of some importance that should have been ascertained earlier. After this for some time I saw no more rises, but about one o'clock the fish began to move on a shallow lower down. In three minutes they were boiling all over the place, and in five I had lost my nerve, casting wildly against a wind which shrieked almost straight across the river, striking with frantic futility whenever a trout mumbled at the medium olive which I had put on, and generally making an exhibition of myself. I had a premonition that the rise would be a short one, and in consequence a wild desire to make the most of it, which was fatal. During the half-hour I only landed one fish, and that was a lean fellow, which it would have been a pity to kill-

How many fish should have been landed I know not, but there were certainly several good rises among many that were by no means good. At half-past one the river might have been empty of fish for all the sign there was of them. One trout was seen to rise quietly under the opposite bank about a quarter to two, and he was the last. Nor when he was in the net did he appear to be in condition yet, so he too went back, and my basket was a blank. From two to seven is five hours—a long time to stand about waiting for a chance rise, and I need only add that the chance rise did not come.

On Tuesday I was informed that the journal which had told us about the earthquake spoke of "local showers, weather decidedly warmer." Therefore I put on thicker raiment, and superimposed a mackintosh. Both safeguards were justified, for the wind had increased, and was bitter, though changed in direction, while the local showers began as we stepped into the trap after breakfast, and were going on when we got out of it in the evening. In reviewing Monday's events I said that five hours, from two till seven, are a long time to wait for a rise. It is hardly necessary to suggest that eight hours, from eleven to seven, are longer still. That was the period devoted by me to the business on Tuesday, my chief distractions being the hurricane, the local showers, and a wonder when the "decidedly warmer" part of the day was to be expected. I learnt afterwards that there was a hatch of fly on a higher reach of the water, and that it resembled the one on Monday, both in character and duration. But I cannot speak from my own know-

ledge. I saw one iron blue at 11.30 a.m., and two medium olives at 1.5 p.m. I caught one little trout by casting at a venture in a carrier, and transferred him to the main stream. I also failed to land another. For the rest, I did not see a sizeable trout move all day. The wind was unspeakable, the local showers were penetrating, and the "decidedly warmer" clause must have referred to some other part of Hampshire. Altogether, the day was a sad experience.

While the season on any dry-fly water begins in April, I suppose one is certain to be tempted out in spite of all suffering. But the man who resolutely declines to visit the chalk-stream before May is wise in his generation. A cold, windy, rainy day is bad enough in itself; when the actual amount of fishing that one can do in it is limited to about half an hour of unsatisfactory and nerve-trying excitement, the question whether it is worth it becomes rather pressing. A day is not without thought to be sacrificed for thirty minutes' fishing. Those fortunate ones who live close at hand, and can go out for the rise, leaving the river when it is over, may take advantage of April's brief opportunities with an equal mind; but the angler from a distance would be less irritated by beginning in May. Yet, say the comforters, even in April are there days on which the rise lasts for four hours or more. They would be of more value if they had not always occurred during the previous week, when one was not there to enjoy them.

3. A Memory of June

The perfect Mayfly day is a thing of moods—of sun, cloud, light airs, and cool, deep shades beneath trees in their first fulness of foliage. It is also, of course, a thing of trout—once in a lifetime, perhaps, of as many trout as a man cares to catch, of trout until he grows weary of catching. My memory does not hold many instances of weariness attendant on the capture of trout, and only one wherein the Mayfly played a conspicuous part. But that instance stands by itself, underlined twice in red, once for the day, once for the trout, and once in black for myself. It was an odd day, snatched from Fate, so to speak. I had started out to fish a certain water of an orthodox dry-fly kind—a straight half-mile, a curly corner, another straight half-mile, and so on. In its way it was very nice, but to my thinking (which is, I fear, not the right thinking) it was a trifle dull. There were no surprises about the water, and no obstacles to speak of. The fish just rose at one side, in the middle, or at the other side; one just cast over them with precision—and nothing happened. The fish, in fact, knew a thing or two—more things than I did—which one is apt to resent in Mayfly time. I had no great hopes of the venture, and was there just because in the first week of June one must be.

By a train of events which was curious, but does not concern the narrative, to me, thus pessimistic, came an opportunity of trying "the water below the bridge." I emphasize these words because every good angler must know their significance. That boundary bridge and the others like it have made the Tenth Commandment well-

nigh fall from the tables. I had often observed the water below the bridge from the bridge. Many a hearty trout fed there under the trees, but never an angler in those days seemed to ply his craft, or lack of it, on the commodious, downward-sloping bank. There was only about a hundred yards of this desirable water; below could be seen a mill obscured by bushes, and below that was mystery—more hearty trout probably, with gushing mill-tails and dark pools. I had often speculated on these things, and coveted furiously my neighbour's goods, depreciating the straight half-miles and the curly corner that needed no speculation and held no mystery.

And on this day I turned my back on the known, and started for the unknown. By 9.30 a.m. I was kneeling on the grassy bank of the water below the bridge, watching a rising trout. There was no Mayfly yet, so I offered him a Wickham. I do not think he could ever have seen one before, so impressed was he, and so eagerly did he rise. He weighed three-quarters of a pound, and I returned him. I have never been quite sure why, because he was the first fish of the day, and sizeable as they went in that river; but I think I was ashamed to kill a trout which had never seen a Wickham before. Above the bridge the fish could have told me the name of him who tied it—which I did not know myself. After this I found another trout which had never seen a Wickham before, and returned him, too. Then I hooked and lost one, and set off to explore down behind the mill.

Here, as I had imagined, was gushing water, and here were dark pools, two of them. In the mill-pool,

casting at a venture, I hooked a fourth trout, which got off, and rose a fifth. The Wickham was, I am almost certain, unknown to them, too. But I did not experiment further, returning to the upper stretch when I had ascertained that trees and bushes made fishing in the channels below the pools impossible. Having returned, I put on a Mayfly, whose name suggested liberal opinions, and, I hoped, liberal rewards, and waited for the drakes to hatch out. This they did about midday, and the hearty trout rushed to dinner at once—literally rushed. When trout rush I lose my head, and I made every mistake that the dry-fly angler can make. My proceedings set out in due order and classified would fill a textbook, whose novel and valuable design should be to teach the novice what he should do by the process of negation. He should *not* do everything that I did. Whatever else he might do would be orthodox and correct. Despite all this, however, by lunch-time I had landed five brace, averaging about one pound. The rest of the fish in that water I had risen and missed, or lost, except two, which were so far under a tree that I could not get at them. I put a fly just over each of them, however, *in* the tree, and left it there. Of the ten fish I only killed one—one and a half pounds. The curious feeling of shame was still upon me; I was convinced that none of those trout had ever seen an artificial Mayfly before, and, even if they had seen hundreds, I did not feel justified in keeping them after the exhibition I had made of myself. I went off to lunch in a mood bordering on irritation, and did not come back to the water till after tea, when another hatch of fly might be expected.

In the evening I fished the two pools alternately, and

landed five brace more, whereof I again only kept one fish, and for the same reasons. Never, I should say, did an angler do so little with such opportunities. The trout simply tumbled over one another to get at the fly, while I did my level best to prevent them by every expedient forbidden in the books. The fish landed were simply those my incompetence could not avoid. The one I kept weighed one and a quarter pounds. At last, with still an hour of daylight, I gave it up and departed. I had caught ten brace of fish with the May-fly, but was nevertheless a humiliated and beaten man.

Then occurred one of those redeeming circumstances that relieve life's dark moments as lightning relieves the night. Parallel with the river, and owning its own bridge some fifty yards away, runs a small brook, and it holds trout. On the bridge I lingered, and perceived two feeding fish a few yards apart upstream. To reach them I had to enter the garden of a cottage, and kneel among prickly gooseberry bushes; it was difficult casting, for the trout lay in narrow channels between weeds, and there was a hedge close behind the rod. The whole day long I had been busy demonstrating that this sort of thing was beyond me; yet I caught both those fish in a few minutes, and did it in a way which was creditable, though I make the observation who obviously should not. One weighed one and a quarter pounds, and the other two and a half pounds. Truly, angling is a strange business.

4. The Immortals

Where the Itchen takes its revenges and spreads abroad, after too long confinement between the straight borders of high banks and a railway cutting, there lie they by one, by two, by three, the immortals of the water. They lie there always, and are three pounds apiece. One supposes they have always lain there and have always been three pounds apiece, notwithstanding the tongues of the irreverent, who have been known to hint that they are no more unapproachable than other fish, and that, given the right quality of breeze (something of an easterly tendency, with mildness), and given a decent hatch of fly, and given that exact shade of red quill which one once saw in another man's box and has never been able to match since, they themselves—but their sayings are mere speculation, and nothing to the point. There is, indeed, legend of a master who came to the water in company with one of the irreverent, worked upstream without much success, and finally came to a place whence the immortals could be seen feeding, by one, by two, by three. The master knew nothing of the *genius loci*, and remarked in a matter-of-fact tone that one of them at least ought to be amenable to persuasion. So he knelt upon one knee, and despatched his own very particular brand of olive with his own very particular cut into the wind. From this point, in proper course, the story should lead up to a pretty moral about Homer nodding, pride preceding calamity, or something of that kind. But, as a matter of legend, it does nothing of the sort.

The irreverent maintain that the master slew those

fish by one, by two, and by three, and that this only proves that it is not so much the fly as the fisher, that it is not so much the fisher as the fly, that only one man could have done it, that any man could have done it—that it proves, in fact, anything which needs proving on any side in any argument touching difficult fish. And certainly matters do strike one differently in different chairs and on different hearthrugs. But as concerns the immortals, there is a weakness in the history. The master's leash weighed but seven pounds and three ounces together; whereas the immortals, as has been stated, weigh, and must always have weighed, three pounds apiece, which calculation will show to make an aggregate of nine pounds. Also, they are there now. Therefore, whatever the master may have done, he cannot have captured the immortals.

No one, of course, has done so. Some have tried. The author of this apologetic, panegyric (or whatever it is) has tried. Also he has watched another, one of the irreverent, trying. It is pleasant, says the poet, from the security of the shore to watch others in distress upon the vasty deep; though, as a matter of fact, where the immortals are it is not deep, but shallow, which may have something to do with it. But the simile serves well enough, both for the pleasure and the distress. There is a coign of vantage just opposite to the fish from which you can take this pleasure—behind herbage in a ditch. You get to it by way of the ditch, and you conceal your head in the herbage, so that you can see the immortals on a bright day without their seeing you. But you cannot cover

them from there by reason of the herbage and the drag; it is doubtful if even the master could. To cover them you must kneel far away downstream on knobby lumps of chalk, which is not at all comfortable; and you must keep your shoulders low, and your head lower, and your rod lowest; and you must cast twenty-two yards at least; and the wind must be blowing into your face (or the immortals will not be feeding); and you must make allowances for the fact that the fish are in a bay where the water is slack, while your line is extended over a rapid glide, and in no wise able to linger in sympathy with the fly; there is every material for distress. But some men know no hesitations, and that other had built him a new fly, one of those super-imagines whose hackles blaze red at one angle, light yellow at another, gold at another, and so forth—an irresistible fly, indeed, to all fish of ordinary curiosity. So he approached to the attack with confidence, crept up to the knobby ridge of chalk, and then knelt on his right knee.

Meanwhile the immortals, each some four yards apart from each, fed in a stately row, one at the head, another in the middle, and the third at the tail, of the little bay. They were all plainly visible to the observer, whose feet were in the ditch and whose head among the herbage, for the sun was doing them honour. The angler did not open the campaign all at once. He transferred himself and his weight rather suddenly to his left knee, and laid his rod down that he might rub the right. Soon after he had to rub the left, and his face was as the face of one who suffers. Without knee-pads knobby lumps of chalk are not every man's

hassock. Finally, he patted the ground and tried kneeling on both knees. This seemed rather more successful, and the rod was taken up. As an exhibition of underhand casting the extending of line was very pretty, but unhappily, just as enough had been got out, the fly took hold of the clump of rushes growing behind the rod. Thereupon the angler had to creep away, release the hook, and then begin again.

A position of comparative comfort once lost is not easily regained without knee-pads, so it was considerably later when the line at last swept backwards and forwards. This time the rod was held higher, on account, no doubt, of the reeds, and it may have been for this reason that before ever the fly fell the lowest immortal stopped feeding, turned, and went away. Made aware of this by the onlooker, the angler crept on a few yards for attack on the second fish, which was still rising, and again sought diligently for a spot where kneeling was not an agony. He had just found it, when the second immortal, after a second or two of evident thought, also turned and went away. The third fish continued to feed, and the angler crawled a little nearer, found a kneeling-place, got out his line, and at last placed the fly beautifully about six inches in front of his enemy's nose. It was not taken, but "He turned, didn't he?" the angler felt able to ask. This was a fact, and the observer was able to answer "Yes." But truth constrained him to add that the third immortal had merely turned, like his fellows, for the purpose of departure, and that further efforts would be useless.

Such are the immortals, and such (as their humble

chronicler knows too well from his own proper experience) is the lot of those who would outwit them. It may be that the bank shakes; it may be that they have eyes in their tails. Whatever may be the cause of their security, there they lie always by one, by two, by three—and three pounds apiece.

5. The Evening Rise

The angler is a hopeful mortal who ought to know better, and the evening rise is a delusion based on his weak readiness to believe all good things of the time that is coming; also, there never was a river better named than the Test. If an angler should win through four days on this river (taken when leisure permitted, and in malign consequence when the conditions were uniformly unfavourable) without having his patience tried to the breaking-point, set him down as the angler who is indeed complete. The Itchen has a name full of irritating possibilities, and it does its best to deserve it. But the other has something of solemnity in its designation, as befits a stream whose trout are of greater size and whose fascination for the fisherman is so much the more irresistible.

Yet, patience or no patience, an invitation to fish the Test is a thing to accept by telegram, for there are days when the fish rise boldly, and the angler fills his creel with three-pounders—other men have these days, so one is sure of it. Also there is the evening rise; one has this oneself, though it somehow differs from other people's, if one may judge from their stirring accounts. The comparison of experiences is always

useful, so a description of four varieties of the evening rise witnessed on the Test may not be amiss. The first was nearly at the end of June, after an amazingly hot day, as hot days go in England now. A north-westerly breeze and a conspicuous lack of fly had kept the fish down, except for one or two old stagers that were feeding lazily and safely on black smuts, whose microscopic size forbade imitation. But in the evening the wind dropped, the sky became a glorious expanse of gold and rose as the sun sank, and the rise seemed a moral certainty.

Placed by my friend's kindness at the very best spot on his water, a gliding shallow above the weir on which the three-pounders were wont to dine, I esteemed myself fortunate, and was almost immediately rewarded by seeing a rise. Creeping into a position among some rushes below the fish, I covered him with a medium-sized blue dun, which he took without hesitation. But the luck was on his side. Though he was apparently well hooked, and though the line never slackened, the hook came away after his first magnificent rush, and I realized that one three-pounder at least was not mine. I withdrew sadly, and made my way upstream towards a bend where, above a piece of camp-sheathing, a big fish had been spotted in the daytime. The evening light made it possible to see a rise from a long distance, and I soon marked a ring in the desired spot close under my own bank. But, alas! even as I marked it something else claimed attention—a thin veil of mist that seemed to be coming downstream. I ran, but the mist reached him before I did, and he rose no more. The fatal mist then moved on

to spoil the rest of the water, and, though one two-pounder rewarded a desperate race to the shallow below the weir, the evening rise may be said to have ended before it had really begun, and not another trout moved.

The next day was not unlike the first, except that it was not quite so hot and rather more windy. The evening sky was again glorious, but again, just as the fish seemed likely to feed, the mist made an unwelcome appearance. Before it rose, however, I just had time to hook with a big Wickham the trout above the camp-sheathing—and to lose him. It is most depressing to lose a big fish when time is precious; it encourages a fatalistic anticipation of failure which is bad for the basket. Patches of the baleful mist and a total absence of rising fish did not help matters; but there remained one chance—a small side-stream which was really a backwater of the main river. This had a fair evening reputation, and from the distance it seemed as yet to be free from mist. I therefore hurried over the meadow towards the bridge which crossed it. Here, sure enough, were fish rising, and rising well, and a big sedge seemed appropriate to the hour, as several were fluttering about the banks. But the trout would not look at it, though they continued to rise steadily at something invisible. Nor would they move at a silver sedge of smaller size, nor at a still smaller blue quill. At last, in sheer desperation, I put on the smallest blue dun in the box, and at once rose and hooked a trout that had refused all the other flies. He fought like a thing possessed, and, though he was only one and a half pounds, he had to be handled judiciously on the tiny

hook. Judicious handling means loss of time, and before I had him in the net the mist was upon us. As at a signal, every trout in the stream stopped feeding, and the second evening rise was over.

The third evening rise was experienced a week later, on another side-stream, after a thundery, flyless, fishless day. It consisted of a single dimple, caused by a grayling, and I did not see it myself. But a friend who did took full advantage of it, and the fish was a fine specimen of two pound six ounces. I believe, however, that the trout rose for half an hour after we had gone—an event for which they were, no doubt, waiting. The keeper said next day that it was quite a pleasure to watch them. The fourth day was again devoted to the main river. The sky was heavy with rain all the morning and afternoon, but about five o'clock it began to clear up, and by 7 p.m. a lovely evening was assured. At last I was to see a real evening rise. It was begun by a good fish under the opposite bank, which came up continuously and voraciously until a small silver sedge floated over him. He then came up no more. I attributed this to my having dropped the fly too close to him, and resolved to be more careful with the next trout, which was rising equally steadily about twenty yards higher up. I covered him with a really excellent cast. The fly dropped as lightly as thistledown five feet above him, floated directly over his nose without the least suspicion of a drag, and put him down at once.

This convinced me that the silver sedge was not the fly, and I changed it for an olive quill, which put down a third fish every bit as speedily. A Wickham put

down a fourth, and a black hackle put down a fifth, while a big red sedge put down two at one cast. Then I began to have doubts, and put on a blue dun, as what fly was on the water seemed to be of that character. This invaluable pattern put down about a dozen fish with promptitude, and my doubts increased, but there seemed to be no valid reason for changing it. At last I reached the top of my beat—a big pool shelving out on to a perfect shallow. Here numbers of fish were feasting on a splendid batch of duns, which were plainly visible against the sky. My own fly was visible, too, and it looked exactly like the naturals. It put down those fish one by one until only about six continued to feed. Five of them were beyond my reach, and one, a monster, seemed to care nothing about my fly. He was rising just on the edge of the rapid at the head of the pool, and the blue dun passed over him several times, leaving him unmoved. My friend, who, being a better fisherman than I, had succeeded in putting down all the fish in his own section more quickly, and had come down to watch me, questioned my ability to frighten this fish, but I was not convinced. I looked through my fly-box and found an enormous red sedge, built for the Kennet. This I tied on and cast out, and I am pleased to say it put the monster down at once. After this we went home with the consciousness of something accomplished. But I cannot speak highly of the evening rise as I have found it.

6. Hooked and Lost

The angler should beware of those tags of proverbial philosophy which have, insensibly almost, attached themselves to his craft. Chief among them is that fallacious parody which insists in season and out that "it is better to have hooked and lost than never to have hooked at all." There is probably no short sentence that has wrought more havoc with many a serene temper than this "idol of the water-meadow," as, after the ancient fashion, it might be called. On the face of it it seems so reasonable. We do not, one reflects in the study, fish for slaughter; we have no lust for blood; we are contemplative men, interested in the way of a trout with a fly. To have a way with a fly a trout must be alive; the row of corpses on the dish at even is but an accident—a regrettable accident almost, but to be endured, since it shows that we have contemplated the day through to some purpose, and because a sordidly material world demands that theory should sometimes be supported with proofs. Dead trout, in short, are proofs, statistics, tables, things wholly alien from the high thinking of our profession; we would just as soon be without them. So reason we at home, in the train, and even at the waterside, until reason goes reeling under the first buffet of misfortune.

The account of some typical events on the Itchen may serve to illustrate the futility of proverbial philosophy such as this, begotten of a taste for juggling with words, and nurtured by a habit of compromising with truth. In the morning fate was on the side of error;

never a fish would look at anything, though there were rises in plenty and fly in abundance. Olives, reds, blues, gingers, and the shades between were tried conscientiously, but the trout might have all been dead in a dish for the response they gave. The thought arose that "it is better to have hooked and lost than never to have hooked at all," and it seemed a good thought. To it succeeded temptation, and old vows, solemnly taken, became of no account. In short, a fly on a ooo hook was knotted to the cast, and, as all dry-fly anglers, save the very few born lucky, know, this is a sure road to hook and to lose. *Ex nihilo nil fit*—"treble nothings" catch nought. Oddly enough, however, the first fish that rose at the tiny blue upright was caught, and the toy hook was found for once in a way to have taken firm hold. But it was only a small fish, and scarcely sizeable, so it went in again. The second fish rose, and was not hooked. The third, a good one, lay under the opposite bank in a wide place, and it needed a superhuman cast to reach it. But a puff of wind aided, the fly fell right; the trout rose boldly, and in a moment was tearing downstream. Gradually line was wound in, and the fish manœuvred across, through a sparse bed of rushes, over weeds, and into a clear run under the near side. The folding-net was opened, the rod bent to the final strain, and then the fly came easily away, while the fish remained exhausted just out of reach. "It is better to have hooked and lost than never——" But the saying seemed inadequate at the moment, and ended in vigorous but irrelevant Saxon.

The next fish was feeding under the near bank, and

in an easy position. It took the fly like a lamb, gave two kicks, and was also gone. There was a moment of silence, and then, in a still, small voice came, "It is better to have hooked——" But the sentiment faded away at that point. Upstream some fifty yards, and sheltered from the wind by a spinney, was a broad shallow, and on it fed five trout, all good ones, and all within reach from one spot. The first took the blue upright as though it had been waiting for it all day. It ran, jumped, tumbled, and finally gave in, submitting to be drawn netwards, a good two-pounder. Then the fly came away as the net was being lowered to the stream. Again there was a silence, and again an effort was made to snatch consolation out of verbiage. "It is better——" But it was obviously not better, so nothing further was said in that vein. None of the other fish on the shallow would look at the blue upright, so several other flies were put over them, flies large and flies small.

At last a double-hooked black midge (warranted to have hooking powers extraordinary) rose the biggest trout of the five, held it for a second or two, and came away fatigued. "It——" began the angler with heroism, but that was the last word of proverbial philosophy that day; a sentence beginning with "it" can finish in so many ways that it is useless to choose the least appropriate ending, and besides, something had to be said about the black midge before it was taken off. A Wickham, on a No. 1 hook, took its place. The last fish of the five, being somewhat above the rest, had not been disturbed by the struggles of its fellows, and still continued to feed heartily. It was

just above a solitary rush, always a likely position for a free riser, and it took the Wickham at once, with an eager plunge. At last it seemed that a decent trout was destined for the creel, for it played deep and steadily; and then, without warning, that Wickham—that Wickham on a No. 1 hook—came away just as though it had been a "treble nothing"!

And yet there are people who will maintain that "it is better to have hooked——" But even now the words are too full of bitterness for further iteration.

7. August

The dry fly is an exalted thing, and no doubt makes for exalted moods in them that use it. It is grand to feel that one is captain of one's soul, that one can await the beginning of the rise with calm expectancy, unruffled by the fret and fever of those to whom fly-fishing means twenty-four hours of creeping and crawling with three sparsely-hackled flies ever in the water. The dry fly, in fact, touches the heights of philosophy. But take the case of a dry-fly stream, sulky at all times, in August. Thunder is about; there are squalls of wind just enough to ruffle the surface of the glide where one fancies one saw a grayling dimple during a brief spell of calm; the fly—there is no fly; the trout—there are no trout, or if there are (during the Mayfly they were visible enough), Poseidon alone knows where they are hid; moorhens, coots, and dabchicks scuttle about in irritating fashion; that wave, or rather those waves, are eloquent testimony that *Esox lucius* is on the warpath, plague take him! It is now

4.30 p.m., and since 9 a.m. there has not been a single honest rise of honest fish to break the surface. "Whaur," in the words of a great and knowledgeable band of fishermen beyond the Border, "is your dree flee noo?" To be candid, it is stuck in the little ring on the butt, and there it has been all day, save at a few desperate junctures when it has been chucking and chancing over the inhospitable waters. One fish came at it at 11.50 a.m. But by reason of the mathematical truth that the less is unable to contain the greater, nothing was born of the proceeding. Had the fly gone for the fish, belike result would have been more patent.

Tea, that modest stimulant and the comfort that comes of it! Many a dark mood has been charmed away by the brown teapot and the daintily-spread table in the keeper's cottage. Besides, there is a book on a shelf of which a few pages are bound to encourage—*Making a Fishery*. Really, it is absurdly easy to make a fishery, one reflects, as one reads and finds out how it is done. The only wonder is that more people have not performed the small feat. All one has to do is to cut weeds, kill pike, put in trout—with discretion. And having done it, there only remains the catching of them. That is all. Here it is now 5 p.m., and we have been at that game all day. Something is needed besides making your fishery: you must make your rise of fly, and your feeding fish, and your favourable weather. Even then, probably 5 p.m. would come upon you with something still unmade, and your fish uncaught. These meditations last over the first cup of tea. With the second the heart begins to expand. On a nail by the mantelpiece hangs a battered pike

bait, a wagtail. *Esox's* fate is as good as sealed, when the keener weather comes along. It is a blood-thirsty, comforting thought. By the wagtail hangs an old pair of grey wings, a sometime artificial Mayfly—the same, it may be, that lured the five-pounder which fed by the post twenty yards above the bridge. A notable capture was that; it makes one sigh for the roses and raptures of June. It befell just after tea, one has heard, the time of all others to get a big fish, for it leaves some hours for the making of that brace which all men covet—the *par nobile fratrum* of their dreams.

A third cup of tea (the weather being so hot and thundery), and the heart mellows still more. Why, it was after tea that the five-pounder was caught, and even in August there are hours after tea. There should be an evening rise by all the rules, and the blank may yet be broken. So up and away to the bridge with hope renewed. From the bridge the long shallow is visible. On it are big grayling, and *were* not a few ponderous trout. At half-past five the former should begin to rise, at half-past six the latter. And so till dark there will be no lack of employment. Ah, there, sixty yards away, is a big swirling ring; the three-pound grayling, surely! Yes, and again. He will undoubtedly rise at a fly cunningly presented. The stile in the hedge must be climbed and the meadow crossed circuitously, lest heavy footsteps near the bank alarm the fish. Now for a subtle approach on two knees and one hand. Lo! the commotion again just outside that solitary rush. But, alas! what is that? An impudent little head raised for a moment and then gone bewrays the dabchick. It was not the three-pound grayling at all, and

further consideration shows that there is not a rise on all the shallow, except from the tiny trout that feed all day just below the bridge. At this bitter moment of realization the rain sees its opportunity, and the edge of that storm which has been brewing all day breaks without warning. A hurried flight back to the hedge saves a complete drenching, but when the downpour is over half an hour later, there is an uneasy dampness about the shoulders.

No matter; the storm is gone by, and the west is brightening for sunset. Presently the big sedges will be coming out, and careful casting into the lane of afterglow will surely have its reward. Meanwhile on the shallows there is a real rise from a real fish, followed by another. He feeds at last. A ginger quill, and he comes short. A red quill, and he comes short. Other flies, and he comes not at all. He feeds no more. His fellows do not feed at all, and there are no more rises on the shallow. It is 7 p.m., so now for the upper water, the sedge, and that monster that broke two Mayfly casts. He lies at a corner outside the rushes, and comes up with a bang two or three times every likely evening. He is quite a possibility. But what is the matter with the river? It rises, surely; yes, and it has a disordered appearance. Drift-weeds, masses of them, obscure its surface; there is scarcely room for a floating fly between. It is the sudden rise of the water that has moved this débris from its resting places, and fully half an hour must elapse before the surface is clear again. However, it is still early for the sedge, and—horror! there in the distance is a white something rising above the banks. It is the mist, a

good hour before its appointed time—a result, no doubt, of the heavy rain. All is over, and so home. Let us study Mr. Halford once more, and see if he tells us how to make a fishery where there shall be no dabchicks, and no sudden rain, and no rising water, and no floating weeds, and no mist—yes, and no August fishing.

8. The Burden of the Dry-Fly Man

Why is it that, with all one's desire for sweet simplicity in matters of equipment, one goes out encumbered so heavily to the fray? Only the other day, partly as a result of conversation and partly with an eye to the approaching season, I collected and spread on a table a few of the things that consider themselves necessary to my dry-fly fishing—I phrase it in that way because they all get put into basket or bag, in spite of the fact that I disapprove of a good many of them; it is another instance of the antipathy of theory and practice. The first is a box with compartments, ten little ones and one big one. Theoretically each compartment holds one kind of fly to the number of a dozen; in practice, however, things are otherwise. Taking a little compartment at random, I find in it eleven red spinners, four red ants, four red quills, two Brunton's fancies, one Wickham, one green insect, one red tag, one witch, one silver sedge, one small red sedge, one dark olive rather the worse for wear, and (this is a surprise even to myself) one vast bluebottle with a strip of white kid added as a tail.

Those who are given to analysis might deduce a good many things from this list. Mr. Sherlock Holmes

would at once see that the owner of this fly-box—(1) does not use the red spinner much, because eleven of the original dozen still remain (the deduction is true, but I have an idea that there are more red spinners hidden away in other compartments); (2) is not an angler of undeviating method; (3) has most recently fished for grayling; and (4) is addicted to chub-fishing, this last being proved by the bluebottle. Doubtless the great detective would get other evidence which is hidden from me, but the points mentioned are enough to emphasize a moral or two.

In this one compartment have been found twelve patterns, one pattern from each of the small compartments, according to the theory of the box; the big compartment was intended by the original scheme for big red sedges, thus completing an outfit of thirteen patterns, which ought to be enough for anyone. But the scheme has gone agley. There are no big red sedges (they have now acquired a box to themselves, which they share with one spent gnat, two Wickhams, and a roach-hook tied on sorrel hair). But their place is filled with some heterogeneous dozens, among which I note hawthorns, red quills with gilt tails, a yellow dun, black gnats, a Greenwell's glory, a disreputable Coachman, and a little Marryat. There are other patterns in the other compartments—ginger quills, March browns, blue duns, etc., in a confused tangle with some already mentioned and with others whose names I do not even know, if they have names at all—they do not look like it. Thus there must be at least thirty patterns in a box designed to hold thirteen, and, taking the more numerous with the less, there must be

an average of at least a dozen of each kind; twenty-six Wickhams in one compartment, besides others scattered about, give a solid basis on which to ground averages.

One would think this box enough for all occasions, but there are others on the table. There is the one with the big sedges and the roach-hook (since removed) in it, which I have mentioned. It is of like size with the first, and lined with cork. Then there is another thin one, also lined with cork, which I intended for seven dozen hackle flies. But by some inscrutable process it now contains, besides most of the original inhabitants, olive duns, Wickhams, red quills, black gnats, and other odds and ends which have no business there. The fourth box is a simple cardboard affair that once held cigarettes. Now it contains grannoms, Mr. Halford's biggest sedges (which would not go into box No. 7), alders, governors, and one derelict salmon fly (since removed) in a bad state of repair. The fifth box is also of cardboard, and holds hackle flies which would not go into box No. 3. The sixth box contains more hackle flies which would not go into No. 5, and is put into the bag lest I should not have enough. The seventh box is of metal and flannel-lined, and it holds Mr. Halford's new patterns, arranged, after great labour, in orderly rows. At present I can look on them with pleasure as on a piece of work well done, but I tremble to think what they will seem by the end of the season, and what confusion will worse confound both new patterns and old when the different boxes have been out a few times and their contents have got mixed up in the usual manner.

These seven boxes pretty well exhaust the list of dry flies that absolutely *have* to be taken out. Another small box or so will doubtless be added as the season advances, for odd lots of flies have to be acquired now and then, and each lot means another little cardboard receptacle. Then we come to wet flies, for there are days when there is no rise, or when the fish are bulging and a fly has to be offered to them beneath the surface. This necessitates a fly-book, and an eighth box containing wet flies tied on eyed hooks in case of emergencies —a moderate allowance on the whole. Then there is a cast case, with transparent leaves, so that one can select the right cast at sight. But a doubt as to the preservative quality of transparent leaves necessitates a wash-leather pouch with two pockets, one of which is meant for points. I feel better able to trust a cast out of this, which is why the casts have overflowed into the second pocket, leaving no room for points. And that, again, is why there is another pouch with one pocket full of points. The fact that this has only one pocket explains the third wash-leather pouch, whose pocket is also full of points. All these must be taken out, because it is never certain what one may not want, and it is absurd to possess the very thing required in an emergency and to have left it at home.

Then there are reels, the first with a dry-fly line greased and ready for action, the second also similarly prepared, so that when the first line gets sodden and refuses to float any longer, the second may be put on without loss of time. This is a useful provision, and the tin of ointment is to guard against the contingency of both becoming sodden. The third reel contains an

ungreased line, in case it is necessary to change to the wet fly. Beside the reels is the oil-bottle, and beside that a little medicine bottle containing a different and patent oil, which I carry because it was so warmly recommended to me, and because a day or an hour may come when ordinary oil will lose its buoyant powers and something special will be required. Then there are a small tin containing rag for anointing the reel line when required; another tin with cobbler's wax, spare rings, and silk in case of accident; a duster, a spring-balance, a pair of scissors, a knife, a damping-box, a pair of fly-tweezers, and a pin with a large head. At the last moment other necessities often occur to me, and are added to this list; but, as a general rule, the things recorded make up the burden. During the Mayfly season, of course, Mayflies have to be taken as well, and that means one box for extra-special flies of fabulous price, another box for ordinary flies, a third box for spent gnats and hackle Mayflies, and a fourth box for that assorted collection which has seen a certain amount of service, and might (but never does) come in usefully again.

Looking at this awful pile of luggage, I no longer wonder at the fact that my bag often feels heavy on the shoulder long before a fish has been put into it. But I do wonder whether many other anglers stagger about under burdens similarly composed. Some do, I know. I have seen men produce fly-box after fly-box out of their bags, each twice as big as anything I carry. Others possess a "reservoir" box of great size, which is intended to stay at home, and therefore invariably goes down to the water-side. The impulse to be pre-

pared for anything is almost irresistible, but I question whether it adds much to one's sport or pleasure. I have long had a secret conviction that the really happy angler is he who carries a spare cast and three points in an old tobacco-pouch, twelve flies in a matchbox—or, better, six flies in a pill-box—a duster in his pocket, and an oil-bottle slung to a button; and he can even dispense with the last, because he can anoint his six flies before he goes out.

VII—A BASKET ON ALL FOOLS'

THE Doctor, who had been there before, warned me that we must expect wind, for the Flood flows down a wide valley between high hills, which form a natural funnel for all the airs that blow, collecting them from all quarters of the compass and despatching them either up stream or down, as the case may be. Notwithstanding this, the Flood holds good trout, and yields of them, too, if a man can overcome the wind and a few other difficulties. The Doctor had drawn a picture of the river very tempting to one hungry for a little spring trouting—so tempting, indeed, that Friday night saw us embarked on our long journey, and hopeful of an early breakfast and fishing before we were twelve hours older. The Flood is a river of mountain birth, and subject to such rapid increase that it deserves the pseudonym which I have given to it. Therefore it was somewhat disquieting, ere we had left London an hour, to find that it had begun to rain once more, and depressing to realize later on that the farther we journeyed, the harder the rain was coming down. The Doctor opined gloomily that the river would not fish that day, but in the course of his forebodings let me understand that even so all was not

lost. A mile or two away from our headquarters there was a small reservoir on top of a hill where it would be possible to wet a line, though I gathered it would not be very profitable. Also there was the Stickle, a small tributary of the Flood, which we could fish, though it was probable that if the one were out of order the other would be too. Also both rivers cleared very quickly, and, in any case, one cannot be very pessimistic on the eve of one's first spring foray.

As it turned out, the water proved to be rather high, but not too thick, and we sat down, sleepy but in great spirits, at a little after half-past five to the earliest dish of ham and eggs I think I have ever eaten. After it there was great sorting of tackle, and prolonged discussion as to whether my friend should use his thirteen feet, his eleven feet, his ten feet ten inches, his ten feet, or some other of his comprehensive split-cane armoury; he is the completest trout fisher that ever I angled with, having the right rod, reel, line, gut, and flies for all occasions, and, what is more, knowing where to find them at any given moment. He at once proceeded to make the sitting-room homelike by putting five or six trout reels in a row on the window table. For a long time I gazed on them in fascinated silence; they all looked alike, and yet not quite alike, and at last I put the question, Were they all of different sizes or not? It transpired that they were; there was a beautiful diminution of a quarter of an inch between each. The lines on them, too, were graded in proportion to the reels. Of his rods I have spoken (he eventually decided on his ten feet ten inches), and his

fly-books, gut-cases, and other miscellanies showed equal attention to order and sense of what was fitting; while his flies, mostly his own patterns, were very subtle imitations of the real thing, much more lifelike than those to which one is accustomed. His outfit would be a conclusive reply to those who assert that wet-fly fishing is a chuck-and-chance-it affair. As for justification of such nicety, let old Tom, the watcher, speak. "Indeed," he said to me confidentially later in the day, "there's none of them can catch 'em like Dr. P. He's the best fisher that comes here, far and away."

My own humble preparations took no long time, the only problem being a choice between two six-ounce ten-feet rods, and the thought of the promised wind helping me to decide on the stiffer. An hour later we were standing by the Flood ready for the first cast of the season, a momentous thing in anticipation, but usually disappointing in reality. To be candid, my first cast produced nothing but a tangle, and a great many other casts followed before there was any result in the shape of fish—a silvery little two-ounce trout—which I returned, since the Flood trout are of fine proportions for a mountain stream, and one can afford to have a quarter of a pound limit. To be candid once more, I did not enjoy the first hour or two nearly so much as I had expected. The day was cold in spite of a bright sun, the water was icy, and the wind was downstream. Oh, the wind in that valley! Volumes would not do it justice. It ruined our day's sport by increasing in violence just as the fish began to move soon after lunch, and making it impossible either to see or feel a

rise. Finally we went home, about 5 p.m., inglorious, with five trout between us—handsome fish, it is true, averaging over six ounces apiece, and in fine condition for March, but sadly few in comparison with the catch of our hopes. The March brown accounted for them all.

Sunday was not a fishing day, so rain and wind did not so much matter; but as we watched the widening puddles in the road, and heard the shrieking in the chimneys, we had fears for the morrow. Monday was deceptive. It dawned fair; the river was not, after all, out of order, and I rose a good fish almost at once. But trouble was even then beginning. First uprose the wind and stopped my upstream casting; next the river began to get muddy just as the rise was starting, and it was a good hour before we discovered that the discoloration was local, coming from a horrid little ditch about half a mile above us; thirdly, in eagerness to make up for lost time, I got in over my waders, and felt a "demmed moist body" for the rest of the day; fourthly, it began to rain; and, lastly, it blew a gale. My bag consisted of three trout, two of them half-pounders, while the Doctor had in the circumstances earned glory by basketing no less than seven. We retired at last before the elements, which became too much for endurance. The March brown again did nearly all the execution.

On Tuesday the river really was unfishable, being bank high and thick, so we started off for the reservoir of which I have spoken. I had gained an idea that it lay on a protuberance a mile or two off; but when, after a five-mile drive, the Doctor showed me a vast mountain which had to be climbed on foot, the reservoir

lying somewhere behind it, I realized my error. I also regretted my own suggestion that, as the grass and herbage were sure to be wet, waders would be useful and appropriate. Long before we had accomplished the hour of hard collar work, I was abusing waders and all connected with them, and I fear I was abusing the Doctor too for calling the journey a mile or two and the mountain a protuberance. Still, the walk did us good, and the little lake, when reached, disclosed itself as a very lovely place, lying in a cleft of the high lands, whose sides sloped steep up from the water and sheltered it to some extent from the gale that was still blowing elsewhere. Occasional gleams of sunshine made the picture more vernal than anything we had seen yet, and a few clumps of primroses were visible. Elsewhere one half-opened blossom had been all that had gladdened our eyes. As for the fishing, it yielded no great things. Such luck as there was—and there was little about—fell to me, for soon after starting I stumbled on a little colony of willing fish at the windy end of the pool, and succeeded in basketing half a dozen, ranging from about three ounces to nine ounces—the ordinary size of trout there. Most of them were bright Lochlevens, and as game as possible. The biggest one, on feeling the hook, jumped once and then bored down into the depths, which are said to reach eighty feet. It took quite a time to get him within view again. Besides the six caught, the March brown and Wickham on my cast gained me a few more rises, but, the taking corner once passed, not a fish would move; and when I got within hailing distance of the Doctor at the other end, I found that he had only had one fish the

whole time, and no other rise. The rest of the day gave us much hard work, but only one more fish apiece. Still, it was most enjoyable, and light baskets made the long tramp back to the trap easier than it might have been. I was told, by the way, that even so early as March the trout would rise in the evening if the wind dropped—a thing which would make perseverance worth while then as well as later in the year. But that day the wind showed no sign of dropping.

On Wednesday at breakfast I ventured to prophesy that we should both have better baskets, whereupon I was reminded that it was All Fools' Day—a fact which I had forgotten. Remembering, I was sorry for prophesying, because it is an ill day for anglers, albeit the air was much more balmy. However, we meant to insure success if hard work could do it, and started, he to the main river, and I to explore the Stickle under the guidance of old Tom, who, despite the date, had slaughter in his eye, and talked confidently of brave fishing. But for an hour there was no sign of it. I stumbled about among slippery round stones endeavouring to search a series of rough little pools thoroughly, and did not get a rise till 11 a.m., when, in a lovely glide under some trees, where it was necessary to wade and switch low, I saw a yellow gleam as the flies came down towards me. The hand followed the eye, and I was into my first Stickle trout—a pretty little quarter-pounder. The glide was so tempting that I went over it again, getting three more fish, one a good half-pounder. As the rise had not really begun yet, and we had not seen any of the

expected March browns, this was a capital beginning, and we went on up in good spirits.

The next pool or so yielded only a few short rises. Then came another bit of luck, an umbrageous corner giving me four fish over the requisite three ounces in quick succession, and two or three smaller ones, which were returned. After that a sprinkling of March browns appeared, but for a time little fish seemed to predominate, and the basket got no heavier. Still, fish by fish the tale mounted until lunch-time, when Tom had to leave me happy in the possession of a dozen, which was as many as I had dared to hope for. When he had gone the idea came to me that if I was quick about it I might achieve a dozen and a half, so I hurried over the sandwiches and fell to work again—literally, by reason of a rotten bank. Luck was still with me, and from one small pool I secured four out of the necessary six, and the fifth in a run just above. The sixth took some catching, but not nearly so much as the next brace, for which I toiled when the desire for twenty had entered into my soul. The rise proper was then over. I had fished up as far as time permitted, and had to turn my face downstream. Number nineteen came pretty soon, but over and over again number twenty turned out to be too small, and it took more than a mile of water before a fair quarter-pounder seized the March brown and completed the round number. There I might well have rested content, for twenty had been the figure concerning which I had prophesied at breakfast; but now it seemed inadequate.

Two dozen was the basket for me, a determination

strengthened by a marvellous capture of three, one out of each of the little pools below the weir. The last fish now seemed a certainty, for there was still an hour before the train had to be caught, and nearly a mile of water down to the bridge. Yet so uncertain is fate that at about ten minutes to seven I had reached the bridge, and the basket was still twenty-three. Sorely had I been tempted to keep one of the two-ounce fish which had insisted on being unhooked; grievously had I lamented the loss of a good half-pounder in the last pool of all; but there I was incomplete. For a minute or two I debated whether I should make a last expiring effort or no. I was dog-tired and devoid of hope, but twenty-three was a very unsatisfactory total.

So, swiftly deciding, I turned and stumbled back to the pool where I had lost the half-pounder, fishing it down in the dusk. Twenty-four came to me at once, but I blush to say that he weighed little more than two ounces. I put him into my basket with shame, and record the fact with sorrow. What irony of fate ordained that I should catch a nice brace, quite five ounces apiece, immediately afterwards I know not; but so it was, and I just managed to catch the last train by sternly putting away an incipient longing for thirty. It was a delightful day, remarkable for the fact that the trout rose practically from 11 a.m. till dark, a thing which has not often happened to me so early in the year. On the main river, too, the Doctor had found matters much the same, and had utilized the opportunity by getting a fine level baker's dozen, which made mine look like pigmies, and weighed

six pounds together. My specimens weighed but seven pounds all told, but for a small mountain stream the average of about a quarter of a pound made me very content. As for the baleful influence of All Fools' Day, I now, for the first time in my life, begin to doubt it. Whether I am anything of a prophet it is for the Doctor to say—and I fear he is a silent man.

VIII—A WELSH CARP LAKE

IT may be true that Wales rises to greater heights elsewhere, as the natives of the valley aver; but the fair-minded man, whose opinions are not warped by the magnificence of the unknown, would admit yon steeps to be mountains, be there never so many Snowdons in the next county but one. The proof of the mountain is in the climbing, after all, and the natives of the valley do not climb. With that instinct begotten of surroundings which passes very well for wisdom, they remain firmly in the valley, for the most part leaning on the bridge and watching two small trout in the river below—the only trout in the river below. This is another point on which the natives and the fair-minded man will disagree; for, while they assert roundly that there are other, several other, trout in the stream, he knows that this is not the case, for the proof of trout is in the catching, and samlets don't count. The other trout, it is fair to assume, are among the Snowdons in the next county but one.

This is the principal reason why the local mountains have to be faced and overcome. Three good leagues to the east lies a fair sheet of water full of large trout and massive carp, which have never been angled for within

memory of native man. The March brown is the fly, and a big basket is a certainty—so says local wisdom as it leans on the parapet. These are just the innocent fish that a fond fancy had conjured up in London chambers, though it had not estimated the mountains to be so high or the leagues so long; in the Metropolis a mountain comes vaguely before one's mental vision as something after the pattern of Primrose Hill, while a league is merely twenty minutes' drive in the direction of West Kensington. These conceptions, of course, prove to be inadequate, and it takes two good hours and a half to get to the lake—two hours and a half quite fully occupied on steep and slippery turf and amid prickly gorse-bushes. However, the tableland of the second mountain is at last attained, the two miles of comparatively level ground are covered with greater ease, and the lake comes into view. It is not large—about a quarter of a mile across—is almost round, and absolutely treeless, except for two or three shrubs that grow on a little island near the farther shore. The prevailing note in the colouring is yellow; the sun shines yellow, the banks are yellow, and the bottom is yellow. In the foreground, however, is a touch of black—a small boathouse, of which the men of the valley said nothing. There is no boat in it, and its use is not clear. There is no house in miles, and it seems a long distance to come for a row, especially if there is no boat to row in when you get there. Perhaps some sportsman once thought of establishing an estate up here, and began with the boathouse; or perhaps it is not a boathouse at all, but something to do with Druids, and of greater age than it looks; or perhaps—

but this is irrelevant, and the tackle must be put together.

The large trout spoken of are more important than carp, and the outfit is better suited for their capture, for no bottom-fishing tackle was brought into Wales. Accordingly, March brown, coch-y-bondhu, and Greenwell's glory are soon searching the edge of the lake; no rises can be seen, but a nice ripple inspires hope, and the gradual circuit of the shore is begun. Not a trout takes the least notice of the flies, though an occasional wallow a long way out betrays carp, and after much toil and tread it becomes clear that if there are trout here they are not rising—an opinion which gradually mellows to the certainty that there are no trout here to rise. As the point opposite the little island is approached the water becomes much shallower, and the signs of carp more numerous, until at last, in eighteen inches of water, several can plainly be seen swimming lazily about, some fifteen yards from the shore. From force of habit the March brown, coch-y-bondhu, and Greenwell's glory are despatched in pursuit of them, of course without result. The fish display neither interest nor alarm, but merely indifference. It is time to adopt other measures. In the creel is a large lump of paste made of flour and honey, and in the fly-book are hooks. Float there is none, but in this shallow water it is not necessary, and might even be a hindrance. The only difficulty is to get the bait out far enough; honey-paste is not the best thing to cast with a ten-foot fly-rod, and many pellets are scattered about experimentally. Finally, it is proven that fifteen yards is too ambitious a

distance, and an effort is made to swing a large lump out ten.

This is many yards too few now, for the carp have gone away to mark their disapproval of the violent proceedings on the bank; but it is successful, and the honey-paste settles safely on the bottom, a patch of white against the yellow. Perhaps the fish will come back again, though, and a dozen pellets of paste are thrown out to entice them. A seat is taken on the yellow bank, the rod is propped in a crevice, and patience is invoked to aid in the waiting. Patience, after a reasonable time, suggests lunch, which is eaten with an eye on the specks of white. After lunch follows a pipe, and still the specks of white remain undisturbed. Now and again the appearance of a back fin or the tip of a tail shows that the carp are satisfied with their new position twenty-five yards out, and not one seems disposed to return. An hour passes in waiting, and from time to time throwing pellets, so that there is a chain of them between the hook-bait and the fish. A reasonable carp should easily find its way to the big piece that gleams pre-eminent in size and attractiveness.

But all is vain, apparently, and at last patience goes away again. With it wanders attention, and only instinct remains on guard. Instinct it is that recalls the eye to its duty. The line is tightening, and the large lump of paste is invisible. The rod is picked up, and immediately bends prettily to the run of a good fish, and the light check on the winch makes cheering music. But a carp of three pounds does not seriously endanger the tackle, though it fights gamely enough

on a light fly-rod, and a not unduly prolonged contest ends satisfactorily with net and spring-balance. The fish is three pounds one ounce, plump enough, but rather pale in complexion, owing, no doubt, to the colour of his abode, and it has taken not much more than two hours to catch him. This is well enough as carp go, but it is not quite what might have been looked for on a virgin water, nor is the subsequent record of two fish of about the same size in the next three hours quite satisfying. However, it is better than looking at the two small trout in the river, and nine pounds of carp are enough to carry across nine miles of mountain. The return is begun betimes, for it is well not to be benighted in a strange country. Not a trout has been seen to rise all day, and this is explained by the fact that the trout, somewhat magniloquently spoken of by wisdom on the bridge, is dead. There lies his head on the bank—the head of a full five-pounder. How he died is a mystery, but it is sad for a virgin water when its only trout is taken away from it. He is a real loss, and the lake is left with somewhat saddened steps. Henceforward there will be but two trout in the neighbourhood, and life is uncertain.

IX—THE FLOAT

WERE one setting out to construct a philosophy of angling it would be proper, I think, to begin with the float, the link which connects the contemplative man with the wonders of the deep. Everybody knows about floats; even the Philistine uses them to support his inaccuracies touching the craft and the brethren. A sound scholar, from whom I was privileged to receive the rudiments of humane letters, a man decidedly of opinion that fishing, for small boys, was an undesirable species of "loafing," used, I remember, to be particularly severe about the float; it was unfortunate, perhaps, that the word lent itself so kindly to alliteration, for your sound scholar dearly loves a phrase, and if he be a masterful man, is apt to make it not only define a situation but also determine a policy. Happily there were more ways than one out of the school demesne, and the river bank offered several secluded nooks to which the eye of authority never penetrated. The float of those days was a fat, globular thing, gross in aspect, clumsy in movement, and, though its painted cheeks were not unpleasing to the eye, so far as a float ever can legitimately be condemned as a symbol of folly, it could. Even in that

halcyon time when fish were still unsuspicious it needed at least a perch to pull its unwieldy form under; a roach no more than made it wobble. Had the sound scholar based his imputations on the ground of using, not a float, but such a float, I should not now be protesting.

For I readily admit that virtue lies almost wholly in having the right float. Shape is important, and so is colour, and it is pleasant at times to dally with material. I have heard many learned disputations on the respective merits of quills from different birds, one man favouring swan, another goose, a third peacock, and each maintaining his opinion with epic accounts of past sport. But as a rule these disputants are a shade too practical; their floats are for use only, and they make no allowance for the element of beauty which should have its place in the consideration.

I used at one time prodigiously to admire a certain slender kind of float fashioned cunningly out of twin sections of clear quill, amber-varnished, silk-lapped, and tipped at either end with a slim point of bone. I lavished a good shilling thereon (you can buy an admirable cork float for the half of that sum), partly out of respect for the ideal, partly from belief in the efficacy of the lovely object in pursuit of roaches. Certainly it rode the stream in dainty fashion, peeping shyly out like some modest naiad, and responding even to that bite, perceived by the men of Lea alone, when a fat old roach makes a round mouth at the bait and sucks it in only that he may expel it the more emphatically, as a peashooter expels a pea. Out of the water, too, that float was a delight; it was pleasant merely to let it hang in the air and to see the sunlight

captured in its transparent body. Once we had a really great fishing together. It was a glorious August day, and the roach were on the feed in every hole of the backwater, which was a string of holes separated by short gravel shallows. With no more than a loose handful of groundbait scattered broadcast in each hole, and with a good large piece of white paste on the hook, we caught roach literally as fast as we could. The water was a clear brown, and it was most fascinating to see down in the depths the gleam of a broad side as the rod went up and the hook went home, and afterwards to be able to follow every moment of the fighting fish. The man who has not yet played a good roach on gossamer tackle in eight or ten feet of really clear water with the sun on it has a rare pleasure still to come. The roach that day were beauties, and of the twenty kept three would have weighed two pounds apiece had I trusted to instinct and not to a spring-balance which had neither heart nor soul, and was (I maintain it) rusty somewhere inside.

It was shortly after that day that the naiad float disappointed me by parting asunder at the junction of the two sections of quill, and leaving me floatless just as the fish were beginning to bite. The sections could be joined together again, but the float was never the same after. Sooner or later the water would leak in, and the naiad ceased to be a float, becoming a thing of no classification—unless it belonged to the order of plummets. On the whole I prefer my plummets to be of lead, so I gave up the naiad float with a sigh of regret as a last tribute to its beauty. There remains, however, a certain habit of mind induced by it, and I

still strive after floats which are good to look at both in line and colour. A slender body of cork on a porcupine quill can be very gratifying. For colours give me scarlet above and green below, with a little knob of sealing-wax at the top of the quill. This last is for use as well as ornament. The uninitiated might suppose that nothing could well be more visible to the angler than the quill's natural white tip sticking out of the water, but what with the dazzle of sun and flicker of wavelets it is often very hard to see, and it is surprising how the little red knob helps the eye. Also, with its aid one can gauge a bite very nicely. Properly poised, there is half an inch above water, and the half of this is white, the half red. When the white has disappeared you have a noble bite as roach bites go, and you may strike at once. It is not often that the roach of these degenerate days take one's float right down and out of sight. For evening fishing, when the last faint light is on the water, a black-headed float is most visible.

At one time I used to fish occasionally through the dark hours, and I was mightily puzzled to find a float which I could see at all after dark. I tried adding a cone of white paper to the tip, and at first deluded myself into the idea that it was visible; but when, after intently watching it for a long time, I discovered that I was really gazing at nothing, I gave it up. The discovery was due to a horrid eel, which had taken my float off in a wholly opposite direction. Incidentally that eel very nearly made me give up night-fishing also. Let him who doubts try to unhook an eel among thistles by the light of the stars and a wax match.

Later in the same summer, however, I came upon an ancient bream-fisher at dusk perched on a camp-stool, and brooding over the quiet waters like some sad heron. Attached to the top of his float was a feather blacker than the impending gloom, and therefore visible against the water-line longer than anything else.

A man of few words, that ancient. He may perhaps have been susceptible to the mysteries of night, the rustling and whispering of unseen creatures, the melancholy owls in the woods behind, the low murmur of the restless river, the reflected track of the stars growing ever fainter as dawn approached, to the deathly chill of the darkest hour. But of these things he said nothing; his hope was a sackful of bream before sunrise. I sometimes pick up out of a drawer a queer little black object with a fat white head, which I am informed is a "luminous" float, and so often as I do so I think of that old bream-fisher sitting solitary through the nights, and wonder whether he ever met the river-god face to face. For my part, I never could catch anything to speak of in the dark, and the luminous float goes back into the drawer where it has lain all these years unused.

One old writer, by the way, two hundred years ago commended to his disciples the use of glow-worms imprisoned in a clear quill float, and is minute in his instructions as to getting the best light out of them! But I suspect him of depending on tradition rather than on experience. He is more practical when he comes to a float of reed:

"Note, if at any time the angler should be destitute of floats when he comes to the water-side to angle, and

there be e'er a dry sound reed to be gotten, cut it close to the joints, leaving two joints to every float uncut, one at one end, and another at t'other, to keep out the water; it will make a good float in time of need."

Float-caps are most pleasing when cut out of quill and stained a deep red, but most practical when cut from a length of fine black indiarubber tubing. A foot of this will last a season through. You can also embellish your floats yourself if you please. A long swan quill can be given a coat of Lincoln green and a head of crimson with the aid of varnish stain or enamel, and it is then sufficiently attractive to be the companion of one's days. The true test of matrimony is said to be continued ability on the part of the persons involved to survey each other across the breakfast-table without weariness. If you consider that the angler often has to watch his float, motionless —"a painted ship upon a painted ocean"—for hours, with no intrinsic interest beyond the float and the watching, you will perceive that a fair appearance has its value here also. But, of course, one is best pleased with one's float as it vanishes from sight, so I will not seek to press the analogy too closely. Moreover, you can always change your float when you get tired of it, and try another with a new colour scheme. If luck counts for anything, it is sometimes worth doing. But there is a thing about floats which I have noticed sorrowfully, and cannot explain. The one which looks nicest, sits best in the water, and reveals most bites, always is to be found on the line of the other man. To comprehend this one must, I fancy, plumb deeper depths than those of angling.

X—A DAY OF TRIBULATION

IT is mercifully ordained that one's keenest memories are in general of things pleasant. The angler in reminiscent mood loves to dwell on big baskets, soft western breezes, and the other outstanding features of a roseate past. The things he has suffered in the pursuit of his recreation have left but little impression behind, and in retrospect seem but little clouds on the mental horizon. This is as it should be, for if the remembrance of pains were as vivid as the remembrance of pleasures, a man would seriously begin to wonder whether it was worth while. Yet, in spite of this beneficent ordinance of fate, there must be always days in one's angling history that one still regards with horror and indignation—days which no amount of subsequent joy has availed to obliterate.

It has always seemed to me that an undue number of them falls to my share, but this may not be a real philosophical discovery, for I have heard other men complain, apparently with some reason. The worst days of all I group roughly together; they represent the limited number of occasions on which I have sworn a solemn oath to give up fishing for ever. In addition to their own inherent vileness they must,

therefore, also bear the responsibility of several solemn oaths having been broken, though this last is not a charge that I would wish to press too seriously. It would have been a pity if an oath made in haste of an evening had seemed more than an expression of impatience at breakfast-time on the morrow. Only once do I remember really giving up fishing in consequence of a malign day, and in agreement with a vow made in the darkness of despair. The events that led up to the proceeding were these:

I was staying in the West Country for a fortnight's trout-fishing at the end of April. Several days had passed like some pleasant dream. The weather had been perfect, and the trout of the country fairly amenable, so that every evening I was able to display a half-pounder or so, besides the ordinary tale of takeable fish—they ran about five to the pound, and one of half a pound was an achievement. Therefore, lulled into a kind of false security, I was ill-prepared for the day when adversity came rushing against me on the wings of a northerly gale. I started by trudging four miles in wading-stockings and brogues, a tedious form of exercise. But the day before, while taking a Sunday stroll, I had seen a perfectly monstrous trout, four pounds if an ounce, and he had decided my movements for the Monday. However, when the four miles were covered, I found that the wind was tearing straight down the valley, and making it quite impossible to get a fly at him. He had to be approached from below, for overhanging trees almost met above his haunt, and no wet-fly line could be cut into the teeth of the wind. I therefore did not attempt to cover

him, but waited until there should come a lull, and, in the meantime, began to fish downstream with three flies.

I never had a great deal of skill in downstream fishing, and I was not surprised when almost at once a good trout robbed me of the second dropper. Nor was I surprised when, on searching for the damping-box, in which I had put some spare flies to soften the gut, I found that it had been left behind. Accidents of this kind will happen, so I shrugged my shoulders, took out my fly-book, and began to disentangle half a dozen Greenwell's glories, which had got themselves into hopeless confusion. After a good deal of patient work I extricated one and put the gut into my mouth. Then the other five blew away and vanished utterly. As they represented my remaining stock of this valuable fly, I spent half an hour in looking for them. Then I shrugged my shoulders once more, fastened on the dropper, and returned to the fishing. In less than a minute my last Greenwell was gone in another fish. The fly-book was open once more, and a blue upright was taken out, while three red palmers were blown out, never to be seen again—by me, at all events. Looking for them, however, occupied a certain amount of time, and it was fully twenty minutes before I got to fishing again.

So far I had been content to let my line float out with the wind and settle on the water where it would; but now I desired to reach an eddy behind a big stone close to the opposite bank. To this end I attempted a cast across the wind, and failed utterly. A collar of three flies wrapped round one is an awkward thing

to deal with, especially if, as in my case, the tail-fly is fixed in a wading-sock, the first dropper in the landing-net, and the second in the small of one's back. It took me some time to rearrange matters, to replace the second dropper, which broke when I was taking off my coat, and to hunt for the four red spinners which I had the misfortune to lose when I opened my fly-book. But at last I got to work again, and began to realize that, in spite of the gale, the fish were rising in a remarkable manner. Almost every time the flies touched the water I could feel a pluck, but never a fish hooked himself or allowed me to hook him, until at last a big fellow took the tail-fly with a plunge.

There may be men who, during a gale, can control a three-quarter-pound trout at the end of a long line downstream in rough water on gossamer gut, but I am not one of them, and very soon I was searching for the six hare's ears that had been blown out of my book while I was selecting a new tail-fly. I did not find them, and there is no need for me to describe the search. It resembled the searches that had preceded it and those that came after. Never in my life have I lost so many flies in one morning, and I believe that I have never risen and lost a greater number of fish. They seemed madly on the feed, and had it been only possible to fish upstream, I am certain I should have made a big basket. As it was I pricked trout, played them, lost flies in them, and did everything but land them. Finally I left a whole cast in a bush over deep water, and retired from the unequal contest. I judged it well to give myself time to get calm, if that were possible, so I withdrew to the foot of the moorland hill, sat down with my

back to the river, and endeavoured to think of Job. It seemed to me that I could have comforted him a little by contrasting his case with mine, though I did not see where any comfort was to come from for me. But by meditating on one's wrongs I suppose one gets comforted automatically, and presently I plucked up enough spirit to eat my sandwiches, and they did me good. The discovery that I had left my flask behind with the damping-box seemed but a slight thing in comparison with the tremendous evils of the morning, and I drank a draught of pure water from a rill trickling through the moss resignedly.

After this I began to realize that the wind had dropped a little, and at once thought of my four-pounder. If only he could be caught the rest did not matter. A new cast was selected and soaked in the rill, and to it I attached a good big March brown. Then I returned to the river, and made my way up-stream to the monster's haunt. He lay at the head of a long still pool, and from watching him the day before I had gathered that he moved up into the ripple to feed, and that he had a certain beat. I intended, therefore, to fish carefully up this beat, trusting to find him somewhere along it. The wind was now considerably abated, and by wading along one side under the bushes, and casting across and upstream, it was possible to cover the necessary expanse of water. This I proceeded to do, and as this is a tale of woe there is no need to dwell on details. The fish, or a fish of great size, at any rate, was just where I expected, took the fly with a rush, ran out twenty yards of line, leaped twice, ejected the fly, and was gone in about half a minute, leaving

me to my thoughts of Job and his exaggerated griefs.

After this I wandered upstream for a long way without troubling to fish until the crowning misfortune of the day fell upon me. For some distance the river had run through open moorland, but now I came to a field and surmounted a stile. Halfway across I became aware of approaching thunder, and, looking round, perceived that a herd of cattle was stampeding in my direction, apparently of set purpose. To avoid unprofitable argument, I stepped hurriedly down the steep bank into the river, which was just not deep enough to overtop my waders. The cattle reached the bank above, and watched me with indignation as I began to make my way across. Then, as though by concerted arrangement, a fresh enemy appeared on the other side—a big, evil-looking black dog, which had the air of one accustomed to protect homesteads. It stood and waited for me in grim silence. Then it was that I took the solemn oath to give up fishing, not only for that day, but for all time, if only I should win safely out of my parlous situation. I have no doubt that there was nothing to fear from either dog or cattle, but my nerves were upset by calamity. The rest is a tale of splashing downstream until I got back to the moor below the cattle and away from the dog. Incidentally I broke the top of my rod and filled my waders, and had to walk home in dire discomfort and in heavy rain. As to the solemn oath, it was kept for a whole day. The day after, however, was the perfection of fishing weather, and the river had fined down nicely.

XI—THE PATH OF GOOD INTENTIONS

ONCE more the hands have crept round the dial, and we stand with backs to the past and faces to the future, each man laying his own causeway whereon he shall walk. Ever and anon there is a backward glance over the shoulder at the old trail started upon a year ago, then a neat paved way, now, alas! a confused track of uprooted stones, scarcely to be recognized for a way at all. The sight causes a smile, a shrug, or a sigh, as the case may be; but in most cases it has no further effect. The past and the future are widely sundered just now, and we turn to our good resolutions with enthusiasm undiminished, confidence undisturbed. To-morrow marks the dawning of a new era; the new year brings the golden age in which a man can go steadfast and secure. From this moment we and our better selves are at unity and peace.

Thump—the first paving-stone is heavy carrying, and I fear it has fallen slightly askew. It is no light matter this year to abandon that project of March browns. Yellow-bodied they were to have been, and so like a fresh-water shrimp as they moved in short jumps under the water that no trout could

have resisted them. They would have proved just the thing for saving a blank in cold April, when flies hatch not and the purist spikes his rod. But no matter, "more was lost at Mohacs field," and we, too, will spike our rod. Shall not the new year make temper serene? Very likely, moreover, we shall not fish a dry-fly stream next April. For two years we have vowed not to do so again; three is a lucky number, so the year which begins to-morrow should see us renew that vow to some purpose.

Alas! the second stone is grievously out of line, and it is ill-hewn besides. Still, it seems securely rooted in its soft bed, and it will take much to disturb it. Under it reposes that gold-bodied abomination, the Wickham. No more shall timorous troutlets rise to its deceitful glitter, no more shall we blush for shame as we meet the cold eye of the exact-imitation man; no more shall he drag confession from us as to the fly which did our brace of trout to death. There will be nothing to confess. We shall have no brace of trout. We shall thereby flatter him with the sincerest flattery, and he will pat us on the head as well-meaning young beginners. Pride will be ours; and what is a brace of trout compared with a clear conscience? Away with the insidious reasoning which suggests that the Wickham is the imitation of some kind of sedge. It is not; it is a snatch-hook, a spear, a trimmer, a—but now it is beneath the paving-stone, and of the dead we must speak no ill.

It is odd how difficult a thing is unless you are constantly doing it. Once a year is not enough to keep a man in practice. The third stone is, it is true,

more or less in position, but it lies at an absurd slant, and if that projecting edge does not cause a stumble it will be a miracle and a mercy. Now for chalk and an inscription. *Hic jacet*—no, this is foolishness; it is not a tombstone, but an item in the path of virtue. What if it does cover the mortal remains of our beloved rod, companion of our joys, partner of our sorrows? Let the dead bury their dead. It weighed nine ounces, and was unthinkable, for the word has gone forth or come over, and it is "up to us" to make our path the path of progress. The rod of the future shall be such as will give the poor fish a chance, the kind whose weight is less than that of the number of gold pieces it costs. Big rivers? Long casting? Wind? Why, it will throw the cable from New York to London across an Atlantic gale, and it will intensify the angler's pleasure by playing his fish for a week. Not throw a line from London to New York? Not want to play a fish for a week? In the new year we shall no longer be "back numbers" in these matters. We shall get a hustle on our actions, and add refinement to our perceptions at the same time. A great thought, and the stone seems a little more level for it.

The fourth stone leans upon the third in a rather symbolical manner. Beneath it is the reel that has so often made music for our willing ears. It is a good old reel, and has served us well; but it must suffer a like fate with the rod in the interest of progress. It is not fit to be placed on the dainty weapon which must be used in the new year. For that we shall have the four tarpon-power machine fitted with a lightning-

multiplier apparatus, two acetylene lamps, a number—yes, and a licence. So equipped, we shall get much interesting sensation without bothering about trout, and that ought to satisfy any dry-fly man. It were mere sentimentality to regret the old reel, with its cheerful voice, when you can have a new one which will in three turns of the handle wind a fish up to the top ring—if the fish be small enough.

Beneath the next few paving-stones nothing tangible is buried. The resolutions which they mark pertain to procedure, not to equipment. The first concerns the rise. The day of chucking and chancing is past. No more shall the medium olive float over a spot merely because it is a sure hold for a trout; no more shall a fish be invited to take a red quill merely because he is visible; no more shall cold or desperation drive the angler to "fish the stream." The rise is the thing in future, and no rise, no cast. There is a certain purist of my acquaintance whom I have long admired from a distance. He collects natural flies and puts them in bottles; he fishes solely with an imitation of the insect which is visibly or presumably on the water; he uses the new toy rod; and he returns nine-tenths of what he catches. In brief, until quite recently, I thought him something more than human. But one day in the past season I discovered that a leaven of frailty still lingers in him. It was a cold day, the rise was over, and he was casting a blue-winged olive at a venture, and catching fish withal. Henceforth we shall do all else that he does, but we shall not do this, and then we shall be greater than he.

Even higher, too, do we aim, as the next paving-stone attests. There are, so the really great ones tell us, rises and rises. The complete purist will announce whether that ring thirty yards away is caused by a sizeable trout or a small one; and if it be a small one, he will, of course, leave it alone. We are going to do that, too—nay, more, we propose to go further into the matter and discriminate between sizeable fish, confining our attack to male trout over one pound and females over two pounds. Also we are to make but one cast over each trout. Inasmuch as we shall know exactly what fly he is taking, and shall have a duplicate thereof (copied from life) on our line, the one perfect cast will be enough. If he takes, it is well; if he does not, it is well also, perhaps better, and we shall go on to the next. Thus we shall escape the charge (so humbling to the novice who is showing the same fly to a fish for the third time) of "worrying the trout." Indeed, not only shall we escape the charge, we shall be in a position to say a word in season ourselves. The evenness of the eighth paving-stone, and the accuracy with which it is placed, prove that we are mindful of this last duty.

After the eighth come other stones, most of them unsymmetrical in outline and ragged in order. They represent resolutions even loftier in tendency than any that have yet been made. It is well, of course, to cast but once over your feeding fish, but there may be circumstances in which even that once is too much. If, for example, he is taking something below the surface, it is doubtful whether the dry-fly code permits fishing for him. Subaqueous food is not floating food,

and conversely, a floating fly is not subaqueous food; therefore, even should the trout be willing to take the floating fly (which is theoretically impossible), it is to be questioned whether the purist should permit himself to take advantage of such a lapse. The method comes perilously near "chucking and chancing." Again, the trout may be taking but one natural fly out of every six that pass over him. This shows that he is suspicious, or timid, or both. Is the dry-fly man justified in doing that which may only make the fish worse? Assuredly no! Yet again, Mr. Jones may already have passed up the water. Is the dry-fly man at liberty to cover feeding fish which have probably already inspected one of his flies, perhaps several times?—for Mr. Jones is not a purist. Undoubtedly not! And once more, Mr. Smith may be coming up the water behind. Is the dry-fly man to cast over trout which are within his own reach, and therefore within Mr. Smith's when he shall arrive? The dry-fly man must do no such thing. He must go on upstream till he comes to a fish feeding in a spot which he cannot reach, and for him he must angle.

There are many other noble things which we shall do in the new year, many other base ones which we shall leave undone, and the roughly-paved path that we have laid for ourselves stretches into the grey and distant future. How long we shall look upon it without stumbling, how soon we shall begin feverishly to demolish the work of our own hands, and how many of the stones will remain in place on the eve of another new year, who knows? Of one thing I feel pretty confident; if I do all the things I aim at doing, and

do not do all the others I wish to leave undone, at the end of the season I shall have made about a dozen casts, and shall have caught no fish. Already I begin to think I might have constructed a better or, at any rate, an easier path.

XII—DAYS AT DRIFFIELD

WHEN a friend, who is a member of that most select of fishing clubs which preserves and cherishes the Driffield Beck, asked me for the first time to join him in a few days' fishing on the water, I was in no sort of doubt as to my answer. Everything that I had ever heard about the famous stream impelled me to enthusiastic acceptance. For one thing, there were the silver tickets. A silver ticket has always seemed to me the grandest of conceptions—a thing permanent as the hills, and yet transferable as the airs of heaven. One or two happy anglers have I known who for a period of years were always privileged to borrow one of these emblems of landlordship, though none of them, so far as I know, ever made much use of the privilege. But that they had the freedom of Driffield water made them seem great, possibly in their own eyes (for the feeling of power is seductive), and certainly in mine.

Then there was the famous limit of "ten brace." This is as grand in its way as the silver tickets; at any rate, it seems so to the South Countryman. On the southern dry-fly streams where the limit system is in force one is accustomed to something very much

smaller in the way of a legal basket; where there is no limit one deduces either that the water is private, heavily stocked and little fished, or else that the authorities are confident in the ability of their trout to take care of themselves. A club which fixes a limit of ten brace on a stream where such a basket is no utter impossibility must be very sure both of itself and of its fishing. From what I have seen of the beck I can testify that the Driffield anglers are right in their confidence. The water teems with fish, and so long as it is managed with the skill and discretion visibly displayed at present, the club can safely enjoy the proud distinction of inviting those of its members and guests who can do it to make huge baskets.

Driffield Beck has another distinction which, I fancy, places it alone among the chalk-streams: it is hospitable to both the wet-fly and dry-fly methods. The coming of the dry fly has not, as on so many streams, put the wet fly under a ban; the older method seems to do as much execution as the newer, but, as can be readily understood, it needs some assistance from the weather, in form either of wind or rain. In hot, bright, still weather the floating fly takes the first place. I believe my host was one of the first to use it on the beck, well over twenty years ago. He arrived at Driffield early one July morning on his first visit to the stream. The head-keeper of the time met him with a gloomy countenance, and explained that the weather was so hot and bright that fishing was useless; the angler would do well to depart, and come again on a more propitious day. He persevered, however, gave the keeper a first sight of the dry-fly method, and made a

good basket of trout. *Non cuivis homini*—there are few men in these days who could get an opportunity of pioneer work like this.

There is yet another thing about Driffield which made an impression on me—a personal matter, perhaps. As we journeyed from York by the early train on that first day my host cast a discriminating eye over the wolds and predicted a thunderstorm. To me the sky looked a little cloudy, and the air seemed sultry, but I hoped for the best; in the south I have known many a sultry day pass without any event so disturbing as thunder. At Driffield, however, it appears that thunderstorms occur every few hours, or so, after we had thoroughly discussed the subject and exchanged reminiscences of distressing fatalities, I gathered. I do not like thunderstorms, but my friend is very cheerful about them. To his courageous mind each storm represents so many brace of fish; to my timorous soul it means so many hours wasted (from an angling point of view) under the nearest roof. Ajax is sometimes held up as an ensample because he defied the lightning, but I remember acutely that he came to a bad end. The nearer we got to Driffield the less inclined did I become for either defiance or a bad end, for the coming storm was obvious and most alarming.

But the beck was waiting, and I made up my mind to defy, mildly and with reservation, anything that might be coming, and by a little after 9 a.m. was covering the first fish just above a stone bridge which crosses the Sunderlandwick stream. The first effort was not a success, and the fish went down with all the

aplomb of an Itchen trout. Afterwards I worked upstream a little on the right bank, under a wood. A prettier piece of water I never wish to see—weeds cut in artful patches, clear, deep runs between them, bright gravel shallows, and difficult eddies. But the fish were by no means easy to approach, as the bank was rather high and the trees were very awkward for casting. One trout only offered a fair chance—one of those fish that rise just above a little clump of reeds. He took a Wickham, and after a short rough and tumble was in the net—a pretty golden pounder, short and thick.

After putting several other fish down and losing several flies in the trees, I started off downstream, and had a distressing morning. The thunder-heat was intense, my mackintosh was heavy and cumbrous, my brogues were tight for walking, and the fish were smutting in a hopeless fashion. Three or four short rises, and a twelve-inch fish returned because he was too thin for his length, made up the sum of my successes. The reverses, in the shape of fish put down, flies lost, fatigues and despondency, need not be enumerated. They included almost permanent subsidence into a bed of mud which looked hard enough for standing purposes, being overgrown with rushes. I sank up to the very top of my wading-stockings, and had some difficulty in getting out again. By lunch-time there was still only the one fish in my basket. After lunch I made my way down to Bell Mill. The keeper's cottage is close by, and the steadily gathering clouds acted as a warning that shelter would before long be necessary. In the dead water above the mill several fish were smutting close to the scum and

floating weeds that fringed the dam. Over them I tried many flies, and at last hooked one within an inch of the scum with the finest drawn gut and a tiny sylph, a grayling fly of Mr. Rolt's devising which is excellent for smutting trout. The fish gave rare sport on the light tackle, and got right under the scum and weeds two or three times, but, being hooked well, was safely landed. It differed from the first in being silvery, with large brown spots. It was also a few ounces heavier. The same fly hooked and lost another trout just as the storm began with a few heavy drops of rain. After that I withdrew discreetly, and watched a deluge of rain from the keeper's parlour, while I had an excellent tea and listened to the thunder. There were two distinct storms in quick succession, and the rain was tremendous for about an hour and a half.

It stopped at about half-past five, and I started out once more, to find the river decidedly coloured. At a sharp corner in the main stream above the mill three or four trout were rising well, and evidently in the humour; but they would not look at any of the winged patterns I offered them. At last I put on a blue upright, one of my favourite evening flies, and hooked one of the risers at the first cast. It fought like a mad thing, put all the others down, and finally ended its achievements by entering the net and getting out again through a neglected hole in the corner. The hook did not lose its hold, fortunately, and after a second fight, conducted with difficulty on my part through the net, I won the victory. But no man ever deserved a golden pounder less. During the next two hours I worked upstream, but scarcely saw a fish rise at all, and about

8.30 p.m. practically gave it up in despair. Then in a deep, narrow, rather sluggish reach I found four trout rising well, and a sparse hatch of duns coming down. Two of these fish I caught in quick succession with the blue upright, and both weighed about a pound. The others I pricked and lost owing principally to failing light and ill-timed striking. But, with five fish in the basket and ambitions limited by southern experience, I was well satisfied with my first day on the beck. My host, I found on our meeting, had got seven fish, one of them a handsome fellow of one and three quarter pounds. He also had taken advantage of the brief evening rise, securing four of his trout during the last hour.

Since then I have had several opportunities of visiting Driffield, always eagerly seized, for the stream grows upon one mightily. I know no dry-fly water where there is so much variety. At Driffield, though you have as many fishing moods as there are days in the week, you can find water to suit them—strong water, deep water, slack water, quick water, moderate water, even, an it please you—as why should it not? it can be extremely interesting—dead water. And there are trout everywhere.

The size of the Driffield fish is stated to have gone up of late years. Time was when a two-pounder was an event, and when anglers hurried from up river and down to look at one which had actually been caught; but now a fish of that weight is no rarer than it would be on many parts of the Itchen, and the average weight on a good day should be a full pound. Some there are who say that this result has been reached by a reduc-

tion in the number of fish, and in evidence it is argued that a great basket of twenty is now accomplished scarcely once in a season. But that is not valid argument: in these times a ten-brace day is obviously too good to be true. Whatever changes may have taken place at Driffield, one can still catch as many trout there as are good for one, and more than one could in most places. The fish are difficult enough to be interesting, but not beyond the resources of hard work and patience and the essential thing—luck.

Of this last I have had my share. Twice I have had really good days, and known the satisfaction of a heavy creel. The first began on the Sunderlandwick stream mentioned earlier, one of the two branches which join a little below Dawson's mill, and, joining, form the beck proper. But the beginning was a bad one. The whole morning had been spent in trying to cover trout which rose fitfully at trifles, but were so wild that they would not wait for the most careful approach; 1 p.m. arrived, and not one had been risen, much less hooked. About half-past a hatch of light-coloured duns began, and the fish began to take them, though scarcely with enthusiasm. For some time the appearance of the fly seemed to effect no improvement. Three or four good trout rising on a quick shallow obstinately refused to look at anything.

On the next shallow, however, matters brightened, and a handsome fish of one pound seven ounces came to the net, having taken a 00 ginger quill with a rush. The very next cast secured another two ounces heavier, and life seemed worth living again. "One more fish before lunch," was the rather rash resolution then made,

but it was not too rash. A trout of one pound six ounces came to basket from a little weir not far above, though the fish that should have been the "one more" had departed with a ginger quill in his mouth. Between sandwiches, taken at 2.30 p.m., and tea, deferred by efforts after "yet another" till nearly six, three more trout were added to the catch, all with the ginger quill. One of them, a beauty of one pound fifteen ounces, was rising in a very awkward place, where a four-feet wire railing (the top strand barbed) skirts the river on top of a rather high bank. It was necessary to make a back-handed cast over the fence, and it must be confessed that no thought had been given to the problem of landing the trout if he should be hooked. It had to be solved on the spur of the moment by playing the fish dead, and then netting him through the wire fence. He was worth the trouble. Three more fish after tea, two with hackle red quill and one with Welshman's button, completed a grand basket. Nine fish, weighing in all about twelve pounds, are a matter for remembrance.

The other good day was in some ways even better; I had success thrust upon me, despite my efforts to avoid it.

The timely hour of nine found me at Bell Mill with my face upstream and my mind set on the upper waters above Sunderlandwick. Nor did I pause long anywhere till Dawson's Dam—that deep, slow-flowing, tree-shaded haunt of big trout above the next mill—was reached. Here the sight of what, for Driffield, is a heavy fish stopped my progress. He was rising lazily nearly at the bottom of the dam, just below the hatch which feeds the tumbling-bay, and was evidently the

kind of well-known trout which is attacked by every angler in turn and rises to nobody. However, he rose to me at the first cast; in my surprise I struck too soon, and the Wickham, instead of taking firm hold, just caused him to roll over indignantly, and so to disappear. He was—is, perhaps—all of two and a half pounds. Other fish were moving here and there in the dam, but I could make nothing of them with any flies I tried, large or small, so I left the spot and went on to Sunderlandwick Bridge and the streamy water above it.

By now it was about mid-day, and the wind had increased a good deal, while a bank of cloud on the horizon seemed to presage rain. This, however, seemed to suit the fly, for it began to come up as I reached the bridge, above which two or three fish were feeding well—old hands I should judge them, and acquainted with flies of many patterns. I left them in their wisdom and went on. Fifty yards or so above the stile there was a good fish feeding recklessly on the pale olives as they came down, and to him I offered a sort of ginger quill, the pattern of a good friend who has views about pale watery duns and their imitation. The fish took it nobly; we ran downstream together, and the net did its office just at the stile. This was a picture of a trout—short, thick, golden, and one pound twelve ounces—a real beauty, one of the keepers declared on arriving just as it was on the bank. A few yards higher up I got another—one pound six ounces—and then, on the keeper saying affably that he must see me catch just one more, I began to play the fool. Fish after fish rose, fish after fish went down pricked and

surprised. I told my companion that they were coming short, and that one always misses more than one catches; but the fault was probably mine. A critical eye on my proceedings always makes me nervous.

Presently he went on upstream, and I caught a third fish—one pound three ounces—immediately! By lunch-time (on that occasion moved to somewhere near 3 p.m.) I found myself sitting by the first little weir possessed of two brace. Despite losses and mistakes, I had had a good morning, for, beside little ones, two other trout had been returned because I could not remember what the size-limit was, and they only just reached twelve inches to an impartial eye. I found out later that they were well over size. After lunch I briskly hooked and lost the big trout in the weir-pool on which I had had my eye, returned a third twelve-inch fish, and so wandered slowly and without incident back to Bell Mill and tea.

A great place for evening fishing at Driffield is what is called the Parks. A backwater meanders through a large meadow, and when the mill stops work a nice stream flows down it. At other times it is almost stagnant, and the fish are very wary indeed, though not exactly shy, since they see a good deal of human beings. I made my way here after tea, hoping that the mill would stop, as on previous occasions, about 6 p.m. Meanwhile I settled down to try some of the fish which I could see smutting in the little pools among the weeds. The fly was a hackle red quill on a short oo hook and 4X point; the procedure was to cast it on to a pool and let it float there until a cruising

fish saw it and either took or rejected it. I did not expect any result from this, but, strange to say, it was not long before I was engaged in an animated contest with what appeared to be a smallish fish. I could not do anything with him, and when, after a long fight, he eventually came to the net, I found he was not hooked at all, but lassoed round the tail. Such a thing has never happened to me before, though I have heard of it. He weighed fifteen ounces, and I kept him for luck.

After this I played the fool again, losing no less than four good trout one after the other. Two at least should have been mine with reasonable care. Finally, disgusted with my performance, and finding that the mill was not stopping work, I left the Parks and went up to the deep, narrow stream which feeds the mill, and here wound up the evening with a lively piece of sport. Two brace weighing five pounds, with a brace of twelve-inch fish returned, besides rises missed and fish pricked and lost, made the evening memorable. A brace came to the red quill aforesaid, and others to a blue upright. The day yielded four and a half brace. I could have kept seven brace, and if I had only fished properly I believe I might have had ten, the seldom-achieved maximum basket for the water.

Pride goeth before a fall. It was on the same visit that I had a day of unparalleled badness. The weather was very hot, which was partly responsible for it. On the previous evening I had found the upper water a milky white and quite unfishable, and the reason proved to be cattle and horses trampling about in the beck higher up and stirring up the chalk. Driffield

trout do not like chalk and water, and I did not get a rise the whole evening.

This ought to have been a warning to me, but on the next morning I was again on Sunderlandwick Bridge, and preparing to give battle to the biggest trout I had seen in the beck. I saw him, a good three-pounder, moving slowly upstream, and finally beginning to rise about thirty yards above the bridge. I tried him first with a Wickham, changed to a ginger quill, and was just about to try again when down came the chalk and water as before, and the rise was over. Had I been wise, I should, as advised by the keeper, have gone hurriedly downstream and got below Bell Mill, where the discoloration would not be so noticeable. But I was not wise, and I tramped in waders and brogues under a burning sun straight upstream. As I went my indignation increased, and I pictured to myself the pleasure it would be to drive the cattle out of the cool water into the hot sun and flies. At last, about two miles up, I found them, twenty or thirty of them, and they looked so happy that I had not the heart to disturb them. I passed by, to find that the beck was just as thick above them. There was an assemblage of horses in it in the next field but one, and there were more beasts in it a long way above. I went up nearly another mile, till the beck was quite tiny, and never came to them, and the water was no clearer, nor did a fish move the whole way. Finally, I turned round and tramped all the way back again, hotter than I have ever been in my life, pestered with flies, and in a very indifferent temper.

It was 2 p.m. before I got any fishing, and then I settled down to some trout smutting under a tree below the bridge of the first mill. They were very artful, and looked at most things, but would take nothing until I put on one of Mr. Halford's little spinners with a light body. Then at last a fish took fiercely and went straight away, tore line off the reel, came back, and bored heavily in the deep, rough water. "At last a two-pounder," I said to myself, much consoled already. Finally he came reluctantly to the net, and turned out to be a ten-inch fish hooked in the fin. This settled me. I wound up and went off to get tea, leaving all thoughts of fishing till the evening rise. I need not dwell at length on the further features of a deplorable day. I had a long futile tramp down to the lower water. My rod suddenly began to wobble at a ferrule, and had to be roughly spliced with four strips of stick and a piece of string. The fish rose vilely, and were put down at every first cast. I wound up with an inglorious blank.

But there is one memory belonging to the evening which will always be precious. Just at the moment when patience was being strained to the uttermost, when all the grievous wrongs of a grievous day threatened to culminate in a ridiculous fit of temper and despair, there came to my ears a glorious burst of sound, thrilling on the evening air as though the sun were sinking to rest amid the music of the spheres. It was nothing of that sort, of course, only the Driffield town band, which had just begun an evening performance in some meadow near the river. But it

played as a Yorkshire brass band knows how to play, and I had nearly an hour of rapt enjoyment. One cannot, I may say, dry one's fly to waltz measure very well, but one can recover one's temper to any measure, so it be sweet and tuneful. Music is one of the great healers. I owe Driffield a great debt were it but for that hour alone.

XIII—IMPERFECT SYMPATHIES

THIS title has been used by—to compare great with small—another. But Elia said no word of angling that I can recollect, or of anglers, except perhaps by implication, and that unconscious, in so far as the Scots are a nation of anglers. Had he considered them in that light, I dare swear his essay had never been written, and so I feel justified in borrowing his most convenient heading. It was recalled to my mind one day by the side of that historic Winchester water known as Chalkley's. I had just put the net under a small grayling, and was extracting the hook, when I became aware of controversy at my elbow and two urchins engaged therein. The first, after expressing admiration for so vast a fish (it weighed about five ounces), propounded a question as to the manner in which it might most properly be slain. "Cut their 'eads off," said his fellow, with an air of grave experience. I shuddered, as I think would any fly-fisher, at the thought of decapitated Salmonidæ. Even the first urchin dissented, but it was only that he might in effect agree. "They stamps on 'em," he stated at large. A grayling without a head is better than a grayling crushed underfoot, but both are unthinkable; and that was as far as I could sympathize with the boys.

Presently, however, they failed to sympathize with me. "'E's chucked 'im in again," said the first speaker in injured tones. The other demanded an explanation boldly. I gave it to him. "Too small!" he repeated without comprehension, and then thought it over for a while. Presently he observed, "I say, Bill, 'e says it's too small," and then he chuckled. Thereafter, at intervals for several minutes, the two words were repeated in tones of scorn and derision, until at last the boys got tired of it and wandered away, more in sorrow than in anger. A little later I hooked another grayling of much the same size, and was playing it when some ladies came by. Again sympathy was imperfect. "Poor, dear little thing!" said one of them, and I had a most uneasy suspicion that she could, an she would, have said something pithy and penetrating about me too. I shall always regret the fact that she passed on with head averted, and did not see the little grayling go in again. To be condemned for a five-ounce grayling one does not mean to keep is hard.

But who shall escape criticism that angles where the public passes by? I know a water where the public leans on a bridge while the fly-fisherman is busy below. Sometimes a trout is caught there; oftener it is a chub or dace. And practically always the fish, whatever it be, is beneath the size-limit, which is fairly high. "*I* don't go fishing to put 'em in again," is a favourite comment, or, "Say, mister, if you don't want it, give it to me." Occasionally I have seen as many as thirty indignant faces looking at me as some chubling has gone back to the water. Now and then I have tried to explain apologetically, but sympathetic the

faces have never become. Wonder that a man should be so foolish as to labour after the returnable has been the usual result. A friend of mine, however, once had a different experience. He caught a nice trout of about one and a half pounds, and was about to tap it on the head and consign it to his creel, when he heard a grieved voice above: "What do you want to kill an undersized fish like that for? Put it back! Shame!" A one-and-a-half-pound trout is amply sizeable, however, and the fish was killed despite the remonstrances, whereupon the critic exchanged reproof for abuse, which continued until the angler was out of earshot.

Probably criticism of this kind would be heard more often if trout of one and a half pounds were more often caught, for in his relations with the watching public the angler is situated much as the man in Æsop's fable who wanted to please all and failed to conciliate any. It is a mistake to be too compliant with unsolicited advice. Not long ago I was fishing for perch in a Thames eddy, and fairly content with a half-pounder or so that bit at longish intervals. It was at the beginning of one of these intervals when a stranger wandered up the towpath, passed the time of day, and settled down to help me watch the float. A fourth part of the interval passed, and he hazarded the remark that I did not seem to be catching much, to which I weakly assented. The second quarter went by, and he opined that I was in the wrong place. The third quarter he occupied with a moving description of sport that had been enjoyed below a certain bush higher up—in February. Then he hinted that I should do well to transport myself thither. He did more than hint; he

urged, entreated, commanded almost, and at last, when he put it as a personal favour, in spite of the fact that my next perch was about due, I gave way. It was hot, and nearly half a mile to the bush, but he was sure it would be worth while; catching something was a certainty. I did catch something, or rather hooked it; but it was something that refused to come out—a submerged tree probably—and it robbed me of two hooks in succession, and frayed a new cast to rags. I suspect that my adviser had a sense of humour, for, having shown me the spot, he departed on his affairs, leaving me to discover the tree for myself. But there are times when humour does not strike a responsive chord in the angler's breast.

Sometimes, however, the people who advise us for our good err through excess of zeal or through forgetfulness of the fact that times change and we with them. A friend once came to me bubbling with information about a pond. It contained, he had heard, roach and carp of great size, and beside them something mysterious that lived on the bottom and broke all who angled for it. From the description it appeared to be an alligator, for the strongest pike-tackle had been dedicated to it, and had never survived the encounter. I visited the pond. It was a toilsome journey, and the can of live-bait was heavy. I angled for half a day in as unpromising a puddle as could be imagined, and might have angled there a whole day had not providence relented and sent a farmer's boy to give me later intelligence. There had been fish in the pond two years ago, but since then evil-disposed persons had destroyed them all with lime. No alligator had been

found, but there were several big eels. The farmer's boy was rather amused that a man should have come some miles to fish the pond. So, I regret to say, was my friend when he heard the tale.

I have never been sure of the value of that sympathy which consoles with thoughts of the might-have-been. With me the might-have-been is a Friday. "Ah, you ought to have been here yesterday," or, "Yesterday the trout rose from five till dark," or, "Yesterday Mr. A. had two and a half brace with the sedge"—this on a Saturday, when the trout are not moving at all, even at 8 p.m., and when my creel is empty. All things considered, it would be more tactful of the keeper, landlord, or whoever the comforter is, to deal with the present, to offer convincing reasons for the dourness of the fish, and, above all, to leave Mr. A. out of the conversation altogether. One has a great respect and esteem for Mr. A., and one does not wish to be betrayed into unworthy insinuations about him. Yet it is surprising how strangely Friday's sedge is distorted in Saturday's diseased imaginings. The emptier the creel, the bigger that fly seems to grow, and the brighter which is quite wrong and unjustifiable. The only time on Saturday when Friday's achievements and opportunities may usefully be related is early in the morning, while the rod is being put together. Then they may seem prophetic and encouraging. But in the evening they are vanity and worse.

That redeeming quality called sympathy is very human in its imperfection, and so its shortcomings are as varied as are anglers and angling methods. One might write on the subject for ever, instancing

the lofty soul that looks at one askance because one's fly floats down resting, contrary to the ideal, in lopsided fashion on one wing, or because one's rod is ten feet in length instead of ten feet three inches, or for any other little thing that conflicts with a cherished theory. But, as between one angler and another, the subject is too vast to be entered upon here. Sympathy is imperfect from the very root of the matter, which is the desire to catch a fish. I desire to catch a fish, and so does the other man. But I do not want the other man to catch my fish, and he does not want me to catch his. And it may be that the matter goes further, and that, while he acquiesces in my trying for my fish, it pains him to see me doing it with a Wickham; just as certainly there are times when I feel sure he is not likely to succeed with his own fish if he will persist with a dark olive, and cannot help thinking it a pity. But perhaps these little differences add interest to the sport. If we were all in perfect agreement it would be dull, and we might not catch more fish for the perfection.

XIV—HOT DAYS ON THE AVON

IT is odd how erroneous are one's imaginings of places which one has never seen, but of which one has often heard tell. Why I should always have had an idea that the Avon above Salisbury was an uninteresting stream, a sort of canal flowing through a desolate dull land, I know not, but so it was. I also had a kind of feeling that its trout and grayling were inferior to those of Itchen or Test. In short, I had small opinion of the Avon except in its lower waters, where, it was impossible to avoid knowing, there was very fine bottom fishing and the chance of a big salmon or two if one was very lucky. Confession is good for the soul, so I set all this foolishness down; it really does not do to draw mental pictures and form opinions on them. There have been occasions on which, having dreamed of a fair rolling river, I have found the reality to be little more than a stagnant ditch; the disappointment in such a case is ill to bear.

With the first sight of the Avon, to which I have recently had introduction, there came, however, rather a glad sense of hitherto unrevealed delights than dis appointment. It is truly a beautiful stream, flowing

abundant through a lovely valley flanked by bold airy downs, and, what is more, its fish are worthy of all respect; they have a goodly bulk and a flavour on the table that is more than excellent. Nor are they without those arts which confound the fisherman from time to time, the skill to discriminate between real flies and false, the ability to get rid of a hook in mid-air or to break gut by burying themselves in weeds. There are several fine fellows to whom, calmness being now recovered, I take off my hat.

After such a summer as we had been having it would have been churlish to repine at a hot day, and, as a matter of fact, I would always postulate bright sunshine for making the acquaintance of new water. It may not be very good for fishing, but it helps vastly to make things interesting. The shallows and deeps, the likely bends and corners, the awkward weed-beds, posts and other dangers—all are revealed to one's eager eye. And, best of all, one can see the fish, poised close to the surface, swimming lazily at mid-water, or meditating on the bottom. With a clear chalk-river and a bright sun one need never be dull, even though fly be sparse and rises few.

Fly was sparse enough on my two days on the Avon —indeed, I hardly saw a dun the whole time. Smuts there were in plenty and sedges, but they were not enough to set the fish rising freely. Also it was hot—hot as it used to be in days of old when we had real summers; the wading-stockings were both heavy and fatiguing, and the ditches into which one stumbled now and then seemed very numerous and unavoidable. But everything was pure joy, from breakfast in a

shady nook on the lawn to the home-coming after seeing the very end of the evening rise. Nor was sport lacking despite the dearth of fly. On the first morning after exploring the main stream for a while without seeing a rise, I found myself at the mouth of a carrier on whose banks were many bushes. In hot weather bushes are eloquent of "happening fish," those exceptions to the rule of abstinence which cruise about in the shade looking for caterpillars and other likely trifles. Such fish may save the situation on a chalk-stream when no duns are in evidence.

By the side of that carrier I spent the rest of the blissful morning laying siege to several fish that from time to time rose in odd corners. The water was very low and quite stagnant, the hatches above being down, and the trout were in consequence shy, difficult, and very erratic in their movements. The net result of three hours' waiting, stalking, crawling, and casting was four rises to a Wickham. The first produced a fine trout of one and three-quarter pounds. The second led to great alarms in a fish of about the same size. The third was followed by grief and desolation, as a big fish bolted for its home under a willow, and in bolting shook out the hook. The fourth produced another trout, one and a quarter pounds, in rather an odd manner. In turning a sharp corner round a bush I alarmed a moorhen, which scuttled, after the annoying fashion of its tribe, and disturbed the water, as I thought, for yards. I was just going on to the next corner when I saw a rise close above me in the very wake of the bird's scuttling. Standing still, I detached the fly and was about to lengthen line for the cast,

when the fish suddenly came into view swimming downstream under the bushes on the other bank. As its head was now more or less in my direction, I feared to cast, and waited. It rose again, and then, to my dismay, turned sharp to the left as it got opposite to me, and came straight across. It seemed impossible that I could escape observation, standing bolt upright not three yards away, but as a last resource I just flicked the fly on to the water between us. And the trout took it about two yards from my feet!

In the afternoon I returned to the main river, and on a gliding shallow found some grayling rising. Knee-deep below them I had a brisk half-hour's sport, landing seven in quick succession, but only one was worthy of a place in the creel. Here again the Wickham, in a smaller size, was successful. After that there was no fishing to record till the evening, but I can assert that dinner on a shady lawn at half-past six is a magnificent idea; it sends a man out in good case for the evening rise, and blessing the angelic host and hostess who have thought of it. And what an evening rise it was! It did not last long, and the light where I was, lower down than in the morning, was poor owing to trees, but big fish for about half an hour came up with "plops" that did one's heart good. I got three, a grayling of one and a quarter pounds on a ginger quill, another grayling one pound fourteen ounces, and a trout of two and a quarter pounds, both on a small red sedge. A fourth fish, a grayling of about two pounds, got off just at the edge of the net, being held, I expect, too hard. The strange thing about the rise was that there seemed to be neither

duns nor spinners about; probably there were some of the latter, which escaped notice owing to the light.

The second day was even hotter than the first, and not so eventful. On the main river I could do nothing, but picked up a nice brace of grayling in a carrier downstream in the morning, lost two trout and caught and returned a third in the other carrier in the afternoon. There, too, I saw a monster of quite four pounds. He lay in some weeds in the middle of a long narrow pool, occasionally coming out a little way as though prospecting. Once he took a fly, and once in great indignation he chased another trout the whole length of the pool. I could not rise him, but I took note of the pair of them for the evening, and turned homewards. On the way I caught sight of another monster just above a foot-bridge over the main stream, and fished for him for a little, being somewhat puzzled by his restless demeanour. He swam swiftly about in an aimless fashion, and at last came close by where I was kneeling. Then his red fins and silver scales proclaimed him a big chub, the only one of his kind I saw in the whole fishery. His behaviour suggested loneliness in a way that was not without pathos. Near him was a trout of about one and a half pounds in a state of acute nervous suspicion. It behaved like a small dog that would like, but does not dare, to fall upon and slay a bigger one. I should say the chub had not long been in that spot, and that the trout was meditating schemes for driving him away.

After dinner I made a cautious return to the carrier and the home of the four-pounder. He is still there. But fortune smiled upon me none the less, and a small

sedge accounted for the other occupant of the pool, a really beautiful fish of two and a half pounds. The evening rise was but a short affair, and all was over by nine o'clock. Later in the evening I was present at a tragedy. My host called his spring balance to account, and we tested it by mine, which is approximately accurate. It recorded eight ounces too little when weighing a heavy brogue of about two pounds. And then it dawned upon the unfortunate fellow that he had that season had two Avon grayling which weighed two and a half pounds apiece on *his* instrument, to say nothing of sundry large trout! "I have," he said solemnly at last, "enjoyed myself much more this summer than I thought I had."

XV—MAYFLY ON A SURREY STREAM

WHEN I got to the mill my first thought was about the Mayfly. Was it up or not? Usually it appears on the little trout-stream on the borders of Surrey and Hampshire, which members of the club have the privilege of fishing, about June 1, and I had been told that the best of the sport was to be looked for between the 5th and the 10th. The hot weather in May, however, might have hastened its arrival. Ah! there in the distance was the genial countenance of R. Him it would be proper to question. That he was already on the spot and busily greasing his line looked like business. Mayfly? Why, yes, it had been up for some time, and fish were taking it. But they discriminated. On the previous day they had favoured dark wings and ignored yellow, nor had there been any notable captures. Still, prospects were cheery, and wasn't I going to begin? The suggestion was a sound one. Pleasure at finding oneself at the mill on a sunny morning is apt to waste many minutes in pottering and conversation. There was R.'s April two-pounder, an unusual triumph at that season, to be discussed; there were the cats to be stroked (the mill possesses many cats, all

enthusiasts about fish), and there were other matters of importance to be attended to. But such things must yield to the claims of the Mayfly, and very soon, rod in hand and flies in pocket, I was hastening down to the bottom of the water, while R. progressed towards the top.

In the lower stretch the stream is quite a little one, in places not more than eight feet or ten feet wide, with alternate pools and ripples; its trout are elusive, and naturally the big ones are not numerous. They live in the deep holes under willow roots and hollow banks, coming out on to the shallows to feed. At meal-times they may be found in very thin water—so thin, indeed, that there is scarcely enough to cover them. This is bad for the angler, because, approaching incautiously, he finds he has put down or turned off two or three good fish which might have risen if they had had the chance. Another trouble is the dace, insignificant as individuals, but to be reckoned with in bulk. One sees a trout rise upstream, approaches the bank at a casting distance below, kneels, and begins to lengthen line; but ere the fly has fallen a big wave has gone upstream before it, and the trout is alarmed. The shoal of dace has become aware of the angler, and migrated in a body. At certain places the only method is to stand or kneel well back in the meadow and cast across the grass at right angles to the trout, and then it is ten to one that if he rises the line will be hitched up in nettles and the strike ineffectual.

For a couple of hours I wrestled with troubles of this kind, and by the time I got to the footbridge

had had two short rises at a Welshman's button, caught one unsizeable trout and a dace, and seen one Mayfly. I began to think that those pessimists who had said that the Mayfly was a fraud on that stream were right. Crossing the bridge, I came to a reach where for about a hundred and fifty yards the stream runs in lively fashion past a row of willows which line the other bank, and is fairly deep here and there at their roots—an ideal stretch for a trout or two. Here I saw two or three Mayflies, and also some rises, but obviously only from small fish. Then I heard a plop from somewhere in the shade, and knelt down to investigate. Presently down came a Mayfly, and, up in a dark corner behind the bole of a tree, came a trout; the distance between his head and tail showed him to be a good one. A hackle Mayfly was soon tied on and floated down, and immediately I was racing downstream attached to something heavy and active, which made great efforts to get under the roots of each tree it passed. A long, strong fight ended in victory for me, and I gloated over a beautiful yellow fish of just over one and a half pounds, whose only blemish was a mark where he had at some time been pinched by an otter. He had scarcely been placed on a bed of dry rushes in the creel, when, about thirty yards higher up, there was another plop, and a fly was at once despatched to the spot. Up came something with alarming suddenness, and a similar suddenness on the part of the rod left me a fly and a fish the poorer. It looked like a two-pounder, too. One more rise, and a good fish rolled over, and it was lunch-time. I went on to join the little company

of the brethren and eat roast lamb, not ill-content. My fish exceeded by an ounce anything I had hitherto caught on the water.

After lunch I went upstream above the mill, and there found as remarkable a state of things as I have ever seen on a Mayfly river. The water for some three-quarters of a mile pursues a sinuous course between low banks, ending in a wide mill-pound, and, in striking contrast to the stickles below the mill, is deep, and so sluggish as almost to be without current. A Mayfly hatching out sits meditatively in the same place for a long time, unless disturbed by wind. Here and there fish were rising, some of them good ones, but they did not seem to appreciate artificials, even though placed to a nicety in the exact spot of a previous rise. I found out why later, but that day was much puzzled. Surely, I thought, the fish could not be shy; except in the Mayfly time they rise very little to surface food, and are fished for with wet March browns and similar flies. The river is not a dry-fly stream really, and has very little hatch of fly, except in late May and June. At last, seeing a rise in a bay at a bend of the stream, I dropped my fly almost in the ring made by the fish, had an immediate response, and was presently engaged in as fierce a battle as I have ever had with a trout. It was a two-pounder in the pink of condition, and it must have taken seven or eight minutes to land—a beautiful shapely fish of obvious Lochleven ancestry. This completed the day's bag, as after tea I went downstream again, and failed to get anything worth keeping.

The next day, a lovely one, with bright sun and soft airs, I found out the secret of the trout not taking a fly offered to them. Fly being scarce, all were wanderers. At the same bend where I had caught the two-pounder I saw a rise, and then, thanks to the sun, the fish, which was on the move. It took me pretty well an hour to find out what he was doing—cruising round and round the bay, sucking in an occasional fly or spent gnat as he went. He was patrolling a regular beat of some twenty yards, and sometimes, after my fly had fallen in apparently the right place, it would prove that he was five yards farther on. I did not want to run the risk of dropping it right over his nose and perhaps alarming him, so at last I adopted the nervous policy of casting a spent gnat to a point which I knew he would reach sooner or later, and there letting it stop till he did so. Lack of stream made this possible, but the minutes of waiting were anxious. When at last the expected happened and the fly disappeared in a goodly swirl, I was almost paralyzed with terror. However, all went well, and after a fair but not inordinate contest I was exulting over a real beauty of two and three quarter pounds, very much like the two-pounder in shape and colour.

After that a brother angler called my attention to a trout under a bush. The bush was round, and right in the water; the fish was rising in the middle of it. Could I catch it? I thought decidedly not. One cannot throw a fly downstream into a bush with much hope of success, and if one did, trout do not climb up after it. I was about to be even more sarcastic, when suddenly I saw the fish, a big yellow creature; it swam

slowly out of the bush for about a foot, looked round for flies, and went back again. Altering my tone, I suggested that the fish might, at any rate, be risen, though in all likelihood it would go back to the bush with the fly. To be brief, I placed my spent gnat just where the fish had been, waited for a minute or two, and had the wished-for rise. But, being again paralyzed with terror, I made a mess of it, pulled the fly away, and retired, feeling foolish. My friend waited for some time to try another fly, but saw the fish no more, and finally departed, having to seek other waters in another county. He committed the trout to me with his blessing, and about an hour later I rose and missed it again. At last, just before tea-time, Fortune smiled, and after my fly had been waiting by the bush for several minutes it disappeared, and I was pulling a surprised fish by main force away from the bush. So surprised was it that, although well set up and shaped, it made quite a poor fight, and I got it to the net without trouble. With a brace of fish weighing five and a quarter pounds, I felt satisfied, and did not grumble even when an evening mist spoilt the last hour of the day, and prevented me, as I maintain, from catching a monster of five pounds which I had just discovered.

The narrative now ceases to be triumphant. On the third morning, beneath heavy, lowering skies, I spent two and a half hours over two fish, wanderers both, and one of them in an appallingly difficult place under a tree whose branches dipped into the water. Each was feeding with quiet persistence, and seemed a certainty if one could only place a fly before it. I hooked the first, a probable two-pounder, after an

hour, and lost it after a minute. I hooked the other, which was bigger, after an hour and a half, and lost it after a minute and a half. Truly it takes less time to undo than to do. Both fish were apparently well-hooked, but the fly came away for no reason that I could discover. After the second catastrophe the sluices of Heaven opened, and all Mayfly fishing for the day was over. My expedition was blended of joy and sorrow, but joy predominates in afterthought. Those wandering fish in that still water are vastly interesting, and I hope I may see them again another season.

XVI—THE PHILOSOPHY OF FAILURE

I SOMETIMES wonder how many men really do keep that praiseworthy record of failure, a fishing diary. I have made several spasmodic efforts to do so, but each seems to have been foredoomed to an early death. One does not, as a matter of fact, have captures to record, or worth recording, every time one goes a-fishing, and the accompanying circumstances placed in the column devoted to "remarks" are apt to become monotonous. Thus, when I contemplate my longest sustained chronicle,[1] which extended over the months of a long-past April and May, it gives me no pleasurable thrill to find "Wind east, poor show of fly, fish not moving" set down day after day, with scarce the variation of a word, except to aggravate the sufferings that are now happily over; one day in May, for instance, provided a north-east wind, with occasional snowstorms, and no show of fly at all. As to the number of fish killed during those methodical months it is unnecessary to speak. The reader may, however, draw his own conclusions from the fact that at the end

[1] It is no longer so. Since this was written I have tried again. But the diary's principle, I am sorry to say, seems to be modelled on the practice of the sundial—*horas non numero nisi serenas.*

of them the diary was discarded, only to be utilized once more that year, and then to receive the details of a red-letter day, whose entry was quite unnecessary; red-letter days are not forgotten, whether they be inscribed or no.

The blank days, on the other hand, it is surely well to pass by. What possible profit can there be in reading, in one's own handwriting, about the north-easterly gale that blew on such-and-such a date, or about the road-washings that distinguished such another date? The entry of "One unsizeable fish returned" is possibly gratifying to an occasional mood of self-righteousness, but it is neither interesting nor instructive. On the whole, therefore, it were well to keep no damning script of one's past incapacity or ill luck, and to leave the compilation of statistics to those who have on blank days, if there be such persons; or, at any rate, to those who, touching their very occasional days of only partial success, can cite reasons that are convincing to others and creditable to themselves. Nevertheless, the blank day is not without its value, provided it be not remembered too acutely.

I was very much impressed one blank day by the effect that it had had on a friend. We were seeing the last of the trout season on the Itchen, and seeing it in a manner that will not be recorded, in my diary at least. But at the end of a day of thunderous skies, cross-winds, and fugitive trout my friend was splendidly serene. The quiet hours of fishless contemplation had, he said, enabled him to realize an ambition and to formulate and put into working order a really sound philosophy. To me all things that day had been

weariness and vexation. The river would persist in hurrying in the centre and delaying at the sides, making my fly drag like a barge behind a tug; the wind arose at the wrong moments, hurling the cast down upon the water in circles, with the fly in the middle; the herbage on the bank clutched the fly from behind, and caused those horrid shocks which make one look fearfully at one's top-joint; and when at last a clean cast was effected, the dispirited artificial insect lay down on its side and refused to imitate anything, while the reel line began to sink out of pure boredom. Early in the day the natural flies seemed to me numerous enough, and likely to tempt the fish up, but later it was only too evident that they were miserable starvelings, too insignificant in nourishing power to attract more than passing notice of a self-respecting trout—not that there were any self-respecting trout there; they were mere poltroons, unwilling to await the approach, much less abide the onslaught, of the foe. In me these and other woes, too many to recount, had aroused indignation and a sense of wrong; but my friend (doubtless after some trying moments) had been able to cope with them in better fashion. He regarded, he said, the weather, the water, the fish, and everything, with contempt, and had spent a most enjoyable afternoon in alternately reading a book and casting a haughty eye of depreciation on the various matters that sought to disturb his calm. Such a grasp of essential philosophy is worth more than many trout, and my friend may now consider himself armed against outrageous fortune—if he can do the like again, which is not yet proved.

Nor is it every man who can attain to the consolations of such a philosophy. There are memories of blank days that rankle yet. There is that October day spent on one of the most noted pike waters in the Western Midlands, a big lake that was reputed to yield five brace of good fish to a rod on any likely autumn day, and concerning which a relative had much to report. He had fished it the year before, with two other anglers, and the total bag had exceeded thirty pike. Permission was applied for and obtained, and I started at seven o'clock one misty morning on a solitary eleven-mile drive, proposing to do great things and well equipped with bait, both live and dead. But, as ill luck would have it, that October day was one of the hottest of the year, and the pike resented it. One run was the total result of the eleven-mile drive, three dozen live baits, and two dozen dead ones, to say nothing of the exertion of presenting them to the fish with float tackle, paternoster, and spinning flight. And that one run only served to embitter the humiliation. It occurred about four o'clock in the afternoon, when a large dace was exploring a deep, weed-fringed arm of the lake. The float went under ; I struck, was fast in a really big fish, and in the foolishness of my heart rejoiced that the blank was turned into glorious triumph. In retrospect that pike seems to have fought like a giant, and, after a long tussle in the depths, he ran out line irresistibly, until he came to a standstill among the weeds, out of which the rod was powerless to move him. The punt, therefore, must go to him—a matter of great difficulty, as the line had to be kept taut while the anchor was hauled in with the left hand.

This done, however, the tremendous strain on the line moved the punt without the need of a paddle, and presently I could see the fish, which must have been nearly twenty pounds, lying in the weeds close to me, apparently done and ready for the net. This was a capacious instrument, but it was not big enough for the pike and weeds as well. I could only get it half under him, and had to force a way through the thickest part of the weeds before I dared to lift it. The task was nearly done when he suddenly came to life again, gave a vigorous plunge, and smashed the gimp just above the hooks. A wild scoop of the net helped him to get out of his entanglements, and he swam slowly away, leaving me to the meditations on blank days that he had interrupted.

I would give much to be able to look back on that day with the lofty contempt which it doubtless deserves; but even now, after many years, I can only recall it with indignation. Fate plays the angler many a prank, sending his salmon away with his hard-earned half-crown in its mouth, knocking his trout and grayling (particularly his grayling) off the hook just as the net is about to do its office, and depriving him generally of the rewards due to honest endeavour. Fate also smiles the while, and doubtless there is a malignant humour about it all, could one only look at it from every side. The more need, therefore, is there for a detachment of mind which can afford to despise untoward incident, and which, while admitting and enjoying to the full the beauties of a free-rising day, can accept the disappointments of fate's darkest hours without a complaint, and perhaps with the smile of

irony. And yet who knows? It is ill crossing swords with Fate. She might give the philosopher the chance of his lifetime, perhaps in the Mayfly season on some stream far from home, and then, having taken away his repairing outfit, break his rod for him in the middle joint. Even he might then be indignant.

XVII—ON THE GLOUCESTERSHIRE COLN

Bibury

IT was roses, roses all the way, in that fairest of English valleys which is watered by that clearest of trout streams, the Coln, when first I made its acquaintance. I think roses have never played so large a part in my dreams, both sleeping and waking, before. My host's drawing-room window gave upon a rose-bed, and one enormous cream-coloured flower looked in upon us constantly as we sat at tea discussing flies, trout, the "Bibury glare," and other rural topics.

The Bibury glare, by the way, is not a solar manifestation, but a human. It is that expression of dumb but concentrated suffering which attends the dry-fly man when the fish are boiling all round him and he cannot find the right shade of dun. It is, I am told, most noticeable in "Bibury Street," as the roadway which borders part of the Swan Hotel's fishery is called. The angler who suffers from the glare gazes fixedly upon the horizon, and his moustaches (if he wears them) bristle. He says "No" in a final tone if you ask him a question, and to subsequent inquiries answers not at all. He contemplates (one may assume) hurling his fly-box into the river, and of an evening

sits apart, thinking how he may give up fishing in so marked a way as to cause some stir in the world—always a difficult problem. A letter to the *Times*, containing the dignified "Now, sir" thrice and "any thinking man" once, is the solution usually determined upon by bedroom-candle time. And on the morrow you shall see him fishing once more, with countenance as amiable as ever, a brace of fish in his creel, and the Bibury glare a thing clean gone out of mind.

My host is a noticing man, and he told me these things. But he did not tell me them until his discriminating eye had had me under observation for the greater part of a day. After the test he was good enough to say that he had not noticed anything more desperate than usual about my fishing countenance. But (I will be candid) I was hid round a bend at the moment when I was debating within myself whether I should or should not throw my oil-bottle, which had annoyed me, into the river for ever. The fact that there was no pool deep and dark enough for my purpose saved the bottle, but I must plead guilty to the Bibury glare. There was also a half-hour in the meadow at the bottom of the Swan water. The trout had just begun to rise, and I had just discovered that they would take one of the new Halford spinners. I found this out by leaving one in a fish's mouth.

After that I had four left. The next fish covered took greedily, and ran through a patch of weed I hand-lined, let all go slack, pulled gently, pulled hard, and all was to no purpose. Then I became aware that the fish was not in the weed at all; he was lying, played out, just beyond it. The gut was apparently hitched

up. I could see him plainly, a desirable pounder, and at last decided to doff my footgear and wade out to him with the net. This proceeding started him off again—with the fly and eighteen inches of point. A new point and a new fly a little later produced another rise. I felt the fish, and he was off. Afterwards two trout were hooked in quick succession—hooked well. Both got off after a brief run. I then inspected the fly, to find that it had no barb. The third fly cracked off in a puff of wind, and the fourth hooked a fish which went to weed in precisely the same way as the other, and with precisely the same result, except that I did not wade in. It was at this point, when I realized that I no longer had any of the right flies, that I am pretty certain I gazed with considerable intentness at that horizon which seems to border a better and happier world—the Bibury glare, in fact. One thing consoles me. A little later I had a distant view of my host—that noticing man—as he struck, played, and lost a fish. I will not say that he smote the horizon with his rod, but his attitude suggested the possibility of such a thing. Had I seen that earlier, I should very likely have been encouraged to throw my oil-bottle into the river, shallow as it was.

To tell the truth, the Coln at Bibury is full of traps for the temper. To begin with, it has the volume of a brook in the bed of a river; that is to say, it seems extraordinarily shallow to a man accustomed to the Itchen and similar streams. Further, it is clear as crystal owing to the springs, and it is so full of trout that it is difficult to cover a fish without putting three others down, or, rather, sending them furrowing away,

which is worse. But in certain circumstances (a brace of fish acquired early in the day, for instance) these drawbacks become merits. They present themselves as pleasing difficulties to be overcome rather than as grim causes for despair. That brace of fish makes all the difference on any water. In size the Bibury trout are rather less than those of Fairford ; a fish of one and a half pounds on the Swan water is a big one, and anything over that a triumph. But the sizeable three-quarter-pounder is numerous.

Part of the hotel fishery is, as has been said, bounded by the road, and at first it is rather nervous work casting over the low wall before spectators, and taking care not to catch the passer-by. After a bit, however, one loses all sense of shame, and in any case, if one has ever fished "Chalkley's" at Winchester, one is used to publicity. For those who prefer to blush (or glare) unseen, there is water secure from the public both at top and bottom. The top part consists of about half a mile of mill-pound and a side-brook. The latter holds some good fish, but in the summer is very weedy, and has no open spaces for trial casts ; the fly must fall to the inch at the first essay. The mill-pound is sluggish, and the fish cruise about under trees in a rather disconcerting fashion. But by letting the fly remain on the water till a fish sees it one can generally get a rise. I would not advise an angler to go to Bibury after the Mayfly for big baskets, but for interesting fishing it may be commended. In July and August the trout rise more or less all day, and the ordinary red quills, spinners, etc., in small sizes are sure to move some of them.

I have said that a fish of over one and a half pounds is an event at Bibury, but there are bigger ones. There are, for instance, as I found out on a more recent visit, George Washington II. (so named by his acquaintance in compliment to an old original George Washington who was celebrated in the *Field* some few years ago) and Leviathan. They live in private water below the village at a deep bend beyond a rampart of weeds and within a cage of rushes. One sees them feed, like the lions they are, behind Nature's bars. George Washington II. rises, when Leviathan permits, close above a leaning willow, at other times fifteen yards higher up in a corner of the cage. Here I hooked him at 8 p.m. on a blue-winged olive. Having on a cast specially and hurriedly constructed after the first view of Leviathan, I dared greatly, and hauled him, not without tumult and protest, through the rushes, over the weeds, and into a small clear hole on my own side of the river. Then the fly came away. As he weighs two and a half pounds, and as I had been offering him the contents of my fly-box for an hour, I was sorry. A week earlier he had made another angler sorry by breaking him under the tree. Leviathan weighs I do not know what. He looks about thirty inches long, is always near the surface, rises about once in ten minutes, and will, I think, die in his bed. He looked once at a Wickham, and, having looked, immediately sought out George Washington II., drove him away from his corner, and settled in it himself. Perhaps he thought George better able to resist a Wickham, as he had been hooked the night before, and in consequence was wise beyond his years.

Two days on that water I devoted in part to this pair and to four or five other big fish above them whose personalities did not become so definite; they were just plops, waves and swirls to me, no more. Of smaller trout I not only saw, but had my share—four and a half brace on the two days of fish that would average about a pound, the biggest one pound six ounces. They were all beautiful to look at, and those that came to table were excellent to eat. Here and there I saw some biggish rainbows, and caught some small ones on both the waters fished. One or two were so small as to prove that the original stock must have bred in the river, and it seems that they are not trying to leave their quarters, as they do in so many rivers. Indeed, I know not why they should want to leave such quarters. I should not myself. The inhabitant of Bibury, be he fish or human, can have but one dearest wish—to live at Bibury for ever and ever.

One of the attractions of the place is the Bibury fishery, the trout-farm which Mr. A. Severn has established close to the upper mill. It would be difficult to conceive a better place for trout-breeding. It has two sources of water-supply, at one end the river itself and at the other the famous Bibury springs. This makes it possible to vary the climate for the fish. The spring water has a mean temperature all the year round, warm in winter and cold in summer, and by transferring the fish from river ponds to spring ponds, Mr. Severn is able to get remarkable results in the way of growth. A thing I noticed about the ponds was the extraordinary quantity of natural food in

them, principally snails, caddis, and flies. The water is so rich that only a small quantity of artificial food need be given to the fish. Indeed, a good many ponds are now devoted to yearlings and two-year-olds which are not fed at all, but get their living naturally. This does not seem to hinder the growth of the fish, and its advantages are many and obvious. A trout which has always had to forage for itself takes much more kindly to a new water than one which has been liberally fed by hand. I have seen so many instances of large hand-fed fish going sadly out of condition when put into a river to get their own living that I think the trout which has always had to get its own living is the stock fish of the future. The difficulty from the fish-culturist's point of view is that such fish require much more pond space. Mr. Severn told me the sad history of the "last of the Mohicans," or rather of the New-Zealanders, of which he managed to hatch out a few from the first consignment which came to England a few years ago, and met with such bad luck. Most of them were deformed, but one survived and grew—grew mightily, as he accidentally got into a supplementary fry pond and lived on its inhabitants. When the pond was ultimately run off he was found stranded and dead, a prodigious yearling. *Cælum non animam mutant qui trans mare currunt!*

The richness of the Coln water accounts for the fact that it can hold so many fish of good size in so small a compass. Above Bibury the river is really little more than a brook, but during a delightful day on the water so charmingly described in "A Cotswold Village" I was forced to the conclusion that I should have made

a better basket if there had been fewer fish to take alarm at my clumsy casting. As it was, my total of trout killed that day was only three, five or six others being returned as below three-quarters of a pound, though up to the eleven-inch standard of the water.

It is probably heretical to say so, but I will venture the assertion that, when actually engaged on the serious business of trout-fishing, a man has no eye for scenery —terrestrial scenery, at all events. Aquatic scenery, the twining of bright green weeds, the golden gleam of gravel, the olive background of rushes, the dark coolness of the depths—such things must necessarily impress him, because they are part and parcel of his sport. Even of all this he is, it is likely, not appreciative then and there, so to speak. The moments of spiritual uplifting over the beauties of river nature are detached, not consecutive. One comes, perchance, as one rises to survey the world after placing the first fat fish on its bed of dry rushes in the creel; a second as, having given him another brace for company, one sits down to enjoy the frugal but unhurried sandwich. In like manner does the angler take cognizance of the wider world that encloses him and his valley at intervals, and when there is leisure from the stress of trying to catch fish.

So have I observed Bibury, at breakfast from the dining-room window; after tea from the little terrace; from the bridge when, the rain having lifted, I took a Sunday evening stroll as far as the hatchery. Such observation becomes a habit—it might well become a lifelong habit—for than this Cotswold village "earth has not anything to show more fair"; and there are

many good men and true who regard it as the haven where they would be. A grey cottage amongst the trees, with the gable of the Court in view, a roomful of books, a good nag on which to jog to Fairford or Cirencester, or, maybe, to "look at" the hounds, and the freedom of a mile or two of the Coln, the bright stream gliding and winding among the green grass-lands, luxuriant woods, and ancient grey stone houses, manor, farm, and cottage—of such threads are one's dreams spun.

Fairford

The places where a man of moderate means can get a few days of real dry-fly fishing on payment of a reasonable daily sum are sadly few—surprisingly few when one considers how greatly the popularity of the dry fly has increased of late years, and how many people there must be sighing for opportunities. I should have thought that it would be worth the while of some enterprising person to try the experiment of taking a good stretch of a good river within reach of London, and issuing day tickets. But perhaps the profits would not repay the trouble and investment, and the consciousness of altruism, though pleasant, is not in itself a sufficient basis for commercial activity.

As things are, one has but a small selection of accessible dry-fly waters, and, as places are, I know none of these that has more to recommend it than Fairford. The Coln there is rather bigger than at Bibury, and it holds rather bigger fish. It is, perhaps, fished harder, and big baskets are not to be looked for. Still, it is a very charming piece of water,

full of variety and equally full of trout, and the man who cannot amuse himself very well there on a fresh May morning must be hard to please. The ticket-water (it was till recently attached to the Bull Hotel, and is known to history as the "Bull Water"; tickets can still be obtained there as of old) extends from Fairford Bridge downstream for about a mile and a half, and every yard of it is interesting. The trout, of course, are difficult to catch; but, after all, that is a necessary part of modern dry-fly fishing. It adds zest to the game.

The first time I visited Fairford was one Whitsuntide a few years ago, and I was, I remember, very much shocked at the weather vouchsafed; so was every other member of the genial company assembled at the Bull. We were a trustful lot, and we had not taken the ordinary precautions. The ordinary precautions are these: When a man has resolved to give himself a fishing holiday, he should first fix on the date for starting, and afterwards publish the fact abroad. He should tell his friends, his enemies, the man in the street or the train, the waiter in his restaurant—everybody, in fact, who has the slightest excuse for interest in his doings. It would be well also to insert a paragraph in the columns devoted to fashionable intelligence, which ought in itself to give the matter enough publicity to insure the attention of the clerk of the weather, whose business it is to frustrate all that man proposes, and to turn on the east wind to that end. But the angler, having done all that is here counselled, should unostentatiously and without much luggage depart a week earlier than the

date announced; so should he catch the wind in the south and plenty of fly on the river while the unsuspecting official is busy arranging a little cyclone or a trifling displacement of water in America, just to keep his hand in.

But, as has been said, that Whitsuntide anglers were without guile, and Fairford was the scene of a carefully-executed programme of various unpleasant kinds of weather. The trout also were mostly standing on their heads—doubtless by previous arrangement with the official—and they do not take flies with their tails. In the course of evolution the fish of the south appear to have developed eyes in this region, but as yet a second mouth is wanting to the equipment; perhaps some scientific fish-culturist will put this right. From these reasons it came about that the good men and true assembled fared but poorly in the matter of trout, and more than one rod returned of an evening with his fish still to catch, and with sundry convincing reasons for it bubbling out of him. It is pleasant to exchange accounts of success; even more pleasant is it to exchange the tale of failure. In the first case, the other man may often have done better than one has oneself, and the satisfaction of exchange is then marred by a feeling of inferiority; but in the second it is quite impossible that he should have done worse, and one may proudly feel that in ill-luck one yields to no man—thereout sucks one a certain melancholy joy.

There is also a pleasure in mutual abuse of an absent party—in this instance the fish. There is a long, bright, broad shallow below the island which is most tempting to the eye, and here a fish or two may be

found rising almost all day, even when nothing is stirring anywhere else. Also the casting is straightforward: no trees impede the fisherman on his own bank, and the current glides evenly over its bed, so that at the end of the longest line the fly does not drag. But even here, where all seems so easy, success is hard to come at. From afar, standing well back in the meadow, let us suppose the angler to have observed a trout that rises once, twice, and thrice, and is evidently taking a quiet snack between meals. This is the kind of fish that is as welcome during the slack part of the afternoon as flowers in May. First stooping, then crouching, and lastly crawling, the angler approaches the bank, stopping while he is still some five yards back in the meadow. By all the rules this would be considered a sound enough display of tactics, for the trout is full twelve yards out and rather upstream above the angler, so that a diagonal cast will be possible, with a curve in the gut to give floating room to the fly and to send it down first. The approach has indeed been achieved with success, and it would seem that all that remains is to cover the fish, which has just risen again. Line is lengthened rapidly, and enough is just out, when suddenly from under the bank there issues what looks like a torpedo ; it heads straight for the rising trout, making a great wave and disturbing other torpedoes in its passage, until the hitherto placid stream is seamed in every direction, and the fish that rose rises no more. And all this because a miserable trout standing on its head had a bad conscience, and fled on suspicion of human presence, which it could not have detected otherwise!

These "bankers," the prey of their own morbid imaginings, came in for a good deal of comment over the dinner-table; it is legitimate to hope that they were not unaware of it.

However, when the rise is really on, these fish meet with the contempt they deserve from their fellows, and the angler stands a better chance. Also it seems that a tailer in the Coln will sometimes be induced to rise. On Whit Monday three of these equilibrists performed somersaults at my small ginger quill, and, after a spirited contest, came to the net. One of them made an astonishing fight, such as I have seldom experienced in a chalk-stream. The moment it was hooked it simply tore nearly all the line off the reel, and all but succeeded in reaching a willow on the opposite bank a good distance upstream. Stopped at the risk of the fine point, the trout turned and bolted straight downstream for a good fifty yards without slackening speed, followed rather than led by the rod, in spite of anxious haste on the angler's part. After this excursion the fish jumped several times, and made wild but gradually diminishing dashes before it gave in. On the bank it proved to be a perfectly-shaped trout of silvery complexion, but it only weighed a bare three-quarters of a pound, exceeding by an inch the eleven inches which are the size-limit for the water. All the Fairford fish are extremely game when in good condition, behaving more like the trout of a mountain stream than those of Hampshire or Berkshire. Perhaps they are the connecting-link between the two.

One wet but amusing morning was occupied in playing to the gallery, not of set purpose indeed, but

unwillingly. The gallery consisted of Fairford Bridge, and it was occupied at starting only by the youngest inhabitant, who could not get his head over the parapet, and therefore did not matter. Under the bridge, in a swift, rippling stream, live many trout, and they lie and feed in a certain order of precedence. Two feet under the bridge are half-pounders ; two feet higher up are fish of three-quarters of a pound ; after a similar interval come the pounders ; beyond that all is darkness and monsters, to judge from the "plops" that can be heard from time to time. One can only fish one arch without wading, and that by awkward, back-handed casting, unless one is left-handed or ambidextrous. The fishing is difficult, but the trout rise well and visibly, though it is only now and then that they make a mistake and take an artificial fly. Often, too, a mistimed cast lands the fly against the stonework, whence it falls ineffectually back, while five times out of six a puff of wind brings about the same result. Fishing the bridge from the bank means much hard casting with little profit ; by wading, however, it could be commanded much more easily.

It took me quite a long time to insinuate the fly under the bridge at all, and the youngest inhabitant was reinforced by several of his friends before the feat was accomplished. Their rather cynical amusement was then changed to respectful exclamations when the ginger quill rose, hooked, and landed one of the three-quarter-pounders. The fame of this capture got abroad probably, for the gallery began to fill up, and the next fish was landed more or less in the public eye. Then misfortunes began. A fish was hooked,

played for a little, and lost. The fly hit itself against the bridge several times in succession. After that a really fine cast sent it right into the depths of the bridge, whence proceeded the "plops" already mentioned. A "plop" louder than any followed, the tightened line provoked a heavy plunge, and then the fly came away. Of course, the frequent dashing against the bridge had broken the barb. A new fly was put on, and promptly lost in the chestnut-trees behind. Pity began to be expressed on the faces of the spectators. Interest was admissible, admiration was tolerable and even grateful, but pity was too much, and could only be avoided by flight.

A little way below the bridge there used to be, and doubtless still are, quite a number of big trout. An annexe of the hotel gives upon the stream here, and it was the custom for visitors to open a window and throw pieces of bread on the waters. The fish were on the look-out for this, and would at once hurry upstream to partake of the feast. One cold day at the beginning of April, I am sorry to own, I led that excellent sportsman, Woodford, into error by reason of this custom—at any rate, he considers it error, and even now blushes for the deed. Briefly, the matter stood thus. There was a question as to whether the bread-eaters would look at a fly—a discussion, a debate, a wrangle. Finally the point was put to the test. He, complaining bitterly of the cold, stood knee-deep in the water near the further bank, rod in hand; I was at the window holding a slice of bread, and full of scientific zeal.

The bread went down piece by piece, the trout came

up, a four-pounder leading the way, two-pounders respectfully in his wake. Judicious baiting got them all into their accustomed places, and keenly expectant. Then I said "Now," and immediately afterwards a large coachman alighted above the four-pounder's nose. He swirled at it and refused to take it, but the next one came up greedily, and was well hooked. The fight was nothing to speak of, for the trout was not yet in condition, but it weighed two and a half pounds, and decided the argument. Woodford returned it to the water, and has been very much ashamed of his feat ever since. Or it may be that he does not like being worsted in controversy.

It was, I think, the next day that we came in for one of the finest hatches of fly and rises of fish that I have ever seen in April. It was a pouring wet morning with a bitterly cold wind, and I have no doubt that I looked quite as miserable as Woodford. He looked more miserable than anyone else on earth. Then, on a sudden, at about half-past twelve, a very big hatch of olives began, and almost before one could realize it the fish were boiling all over the river as if it were Mayfly time. The feast continued for about an hour and a half, and then the fly stopped; but trout continued to rise here and there quietly for quite two hours more. The fish were not yet in condition, so we returned most of those caught, but we kept about two brace apiece, and went home exulting. Amid my memories of April fishing on chalk-streams that day shines out very gloriously, and Fairford shines with it.

XVIII—THE INCALCULABLE GRAYLING

MAN'S—that is to say, my—opinions are unstable things. It is a humiliating reflection, yet I must so reflect. The grayling, for instance—I have been cursing and praising him with alternate breaths for years now. At times I have earnestly counselled those of my acquaintance with views on stocking to have nothing to do with him; at others I have roundly asserted that he is the jewel of price, the giver of autumn and winter sport, the fighter of resolute battles, and so on. Analyzed strictly, this fluctuation of mind proves, I grieve to be at length convinced, to depend on whether the beast has been at his old depressing game of not rising, his pestilent play of being hooked, giving a wriggle or two, and so going lightly off, his maddening habit of feeding on that which is too small for imitation, or whether, on the contrary, the noble creature has been behaving as such, taking my fly, bending my rod, and lining my basket. Most times, especially of late years, I must own to having cursed; the baskets, and in consequence the blessings, have been few and far between.

And never, I think, did I curse him more vigorously —this cursing, you must know, is not the ordinary lay

business; there is something almost liturgical, solemn, about it: in extreme cases it leads to letters to the *Field* headed "Grayling in Trout Streams"—than when I tried to catch him at Hungerford a little while ago. He did all the things calculated to provoke. For instance, from the tail of my eye I watched him influencing my friend the doctor, about the completest and most skilful fisherman of my knowledge—a man who is nothing if not a philosopher; a man who has been known to lose fifteen salmon in a day through sheer malice of Fate, and yet fare forth as cheerfully as was decent on the morrow. This philosopher, then —I was angling at the next bend, so could both see and hear—was at first mildly surprised at the behaviour of his shoal of grayling. "They rise all right, but I'm hanged if I can hook them!" floated down the breeze. Then there was an interval. Then came "Confound the brutes!" Again an interval. Then "*Con—found* the brutes!" and afterwards alternate voicelessness and speech, until at last a grim silence reigned. I may have relieved it myself; I won't certainly deny it, because very annoying things were happening to me too. But the philosopher spoke no more, until in tones of studious, if icy, moderation he observed, "I'm going to count these rises; they're very remarkable. One, two, three," and so on, till he got to eight, when more cheerfully he ejaculated, "Got him!" A heavy plunge announced a fine fish, but—it was a trout! And he lost it at the net's edge, so the grayling continued to have the laugh of us. The Kennet very nearly caused the heading of this to be "Grayling in Trout Streams."

Yet one must be as just as it is possible for a being possessed of an ordinary human temper to be. I have had delightful days with and without grayling. I remember two of them late in December spent on that lovely little stream the Wylye, in the portion preserved by the Wilton Club. I enjoyed that expedition immensely, though circumstances were not exactly favourable to happiness. The first day was one of those without grayling. The weather was raw, damp and depressing, and there was enough fog to obscure all the surrounding country, though just not enough to make fly-fishing impossible. The bag consisted, oddly enough, of three large dace, which were rising in a typical grayling glide after the typical grayling fashion. A few small grayling were taken and returned; not a fly appeared on the water all day, and the cold was extremely penetrating and unpleasant.

At night there was a sharp frost, which made matters a little more hopeful for the morrow, if only the sun should come out to put the grayling well on the feed. But the morrow came, and with it a thicker mist than ever—so thick that it seemed hardly worth while to go out at all. But the air was crisp, and there was a chance that midday might effect a clearance, so a start was made about 9.30 a.m. A good two miles of river bank were covered before ever a rise was seen, and the exercise was welcome, for it was still freezing sharply. At last, on a broad shallow above a footbridge, a few circles were dimly seen out in mid-stream, and it seemed time to begin to fish. There was no fly hatching out, but as a matter of form a small dark olive was tried first, with no result. A Wickham

followed, was also disregarded, and was succeeded by a medium-sized Brunton's fancy.

It was not possible to see the fly as it floated, and the utmost that could be done was to watch for its fall, and then guess at its probable position lower down the stream, striking at any sign of a ring in the neighbourhood. The grayling continued to rise, and this was an encouragement to cast over them, even though an occasional strike proved that they were rising purely on their own business. At last, however, a fish actually did take the fly, was hooked, and landed—a tiny little thing of some five inches, which returned to its own place. Another microscopic fish was pricked, and then the foolishness of wasting any more time over the shoal, which was obviously composed of fry, became evident. A move was accordingly made upstream, and, in the interests of warmth, a mile was covered at a good round pace. The mist now lifted a little, and it became possible to see not only the other bank of the river, but even the red roofs of a neighbouring village; also there was a faint—very faint—glow which indicated that the sun was in existence, even though not quite visible. Simultaneously the grayling began to rise, but only, as it appeared, in one short stretch. Both above and below not a fish moved, but in this stretch they rose well at nothing, or nothing that could be detected.

Almost at once a three-quarter-pound fish accepted the Brunton's fancy, and was safely netted and transferred to the bag as being well above the limit for the water, which is only eleven inches. It was followed by another grayling, a little smaller, which was returned,

perhaps unwisely. Where one is limited to a certain number of brace, the desire to do as well as possible often causes the return of fish which are sizeable but not creditable, and as a rule the basket suffers in consequence. After this no amount of casting seemed to produce any result, and the old disappointing game was played, the grayling being the players. When this happens, the best rule is to stick to it. Sooner or later a fish loses its head and takes the fly which it has seen so frequently. After a good half-hour a small Wickham obtained a rise, and a brisk piece of sport followed before a one-and-a-half-pound grayling was added to the bag. But the Wickham did no more, and was eventually changed for a gold witch, which was not afterwards taken off, for it seemed to serve the purpose. Three grayling were netted in a short time; they were sizeable but not creditable, so they went in again. Then came another better one, approximately one and a half pounds, which was kept. But the hope engendered by its capture was not fulfilled, and all the other fish taken after it, several brace of them, were below the standard of credit, and so were returned. A leash, therefore, made up the total.

But pleasure is not always measurable by the catch, and the day was full of delight. The air was crisp with frost the whole time, but a good deal of walking and hard casting insured warmth enough for comfort. Enough fish were caught to make the fishing interesting, and there was a final moment which almost made up for a week of fog. The rise was over, and a move homewards was about to be made, when the mist suddenly parted over the hills in front, disclosing a

vision of blue sky, red-brown fields, and evening sunlight, which was as beautiful as it was unexpected. Then the mist closed in again, and the day was over.

As a contrast to these winter days may be described two others enjoyed more recently just at the time of year when summer and autumn join hands. The first was on the Avon above Salisbury. There was a capful of wind, but otherwise the weather was perfect—April sun and shade after heavy rain. Things began none too well, for a handsome trout, after refusing a number of patterns, took a pale watery dun, made a good show of running, and then got off. But soon afterwards in a shady spot a fish rose to a red quill with a little gold tag on it, was hooked, and proved to be a grayling of one and a quarter pounds, beautifully marked and coloured. Then I gradually became aware that it was that rarest of opportunities, a grayling day. Where the light favoured I could see the fish, not hugging the utmost bottom, as they mostly do, but poised just above the weeds, cruising, and generally taking an interest in things, with occasionally a rise to the surface. One or two good fish came up short in full view, and I was about to change the fly, when a great swirl caught my attention a little way downstream. A big trout it seemed, and I cautiously approached and knelt down to investigate. There was no trout, but a monstrous grayling, all alone on a clear patch. "The three-pounder at last," I thought, and despatched the fly. Up he came, "wallop," as a good friend puts it, but apparently did not take. At the second offer, however, there was no mistake, and I was fast in the three-pounder. It was a weedy spot, and the gut was thrice

drawn, so the fight was no mean one. But at last I won and got him into the net, and so triumphantly ashore.

He was not a three-pounder at all, only weighing one pound fourteen ounces. I don't despise a grayling of one pound fourteen ounces—far from it; but he certainly looked much more in the water. And I kept on making similar miscalculations with nearly every subsequent fish. In the next I was certain of having found a monster—perhaps I had, but as he broke the 3X gut, I cannot prove it—and in the next after that, which refused a red quill, now tied on stronger gut, but accepted a Brunton's fancy. Again I was a pound too sanguine; he weighed one pound thirteen ounces. And so it was with every grayling afterwards which I caught after having seen him, and most of the sport was the result of stalking individual fish. One, indeed, looked so vast as he lay in a shallow ripple well out in mid-stream that even now I can hardly credit him with having only been one pound thirteen ounces. Whether it was the light, or the magnifying power of Avon water, or my ardent desire some day to get a three-pounder, I should not like to say, but some cause or other made each forecast hopelessly wrong. With a trout, oddly enough, it was not so. He was in plain view rising over some dark weed, and he took a red quill, and fulfilled my expectations on the spring balance—one and three quarter pounds. But though smaller than they seemed, the grayling were a beautiful level lot, and the nine which were kept weighed fourteen and a quarter pounds together, none being more than one pound fourteen ounces. It was a notable day.

The next day was on the Itchen above Winchester. There again there was a bad beginning with a trout, a fine fish of some two pounds, which got off in the weeds. There was a high wind blowing, almost a gale, and all the morning was spent on a side-stream, which was somewhat sheltered by big trees. It produced three trout and one grayling, the former just above the twelve-inch size limit, the latter a nice fish of one pound ten ounces, which fought very strongly. In the afternoon I worked my way up to a broad shallow on the main river above a railway embankment, also somewhat sheltered from the wind, and here it became evident that it was another grayling day. The fish were, as on the Avon, awake and interested, and, though there was practically no fly visible, were rising from time to time; and, what was more to the purpose, they showed a partiality for the big Wickham on a No. 2 hook which I had on, taking it well and boldly. But I could only get a rise by covering a fish immediately after it had risen at something else. So far as I could see—and the light was uncertain—the fish were wandering about a good deal, which may have accounted for that. Between two and four two brace were added to the basket, all being about one pound apiece.

Soon after four heavy rain came, and with it the realization that my mackintosh was in the hut a mile downstream. There was nothing for it but to shelter in the little wood at the top of the water, where were many gnats willing and able to do one a mischief through thick stockings. At intervals, when the rain slackened or the gnats became unbearable, I left the shelter of the trees and fished for a few minutes, for the

grayling went on rising. So I got another brace, one on Tup and the other on Brunton's fancy. At about half-past five came indications of a big hatch of fly beginning, occasional duns appearing on the surface, and fish bulging in all directions; and, despite a cold evening, a big hatch it proved to be, which lasted till after 7 p.m. Never have I seen the Itchen so disturbed by feeding fish, many of them obviously big trout, and it was a sight to make one appreciate the real wealth of this wonderful river. But nearly all were bulging, and only occasionally could I get one to look at the blue-winged olive which I had put on. But the basket was already pretty heavy, so I did not lose my benevolence, and went home well content with a further two brace of grayling. The catch, with the three trout, was seven brace in all, weighing just about fourteen pounds. At present I have feelings of the kindliest nature towards *Salmo thymallus*, the noble creature, the sport-giver, the—— but I had better not overdo it, or I shall never catch him again.

XIX—NOVEMBER ON THE TILL

"Says Tweed to Till,
'What gars ye rin sae still?'
Says Till to Tweed,
'Though ye rin' wi' speed and I rin slaw,
Where ye droon ae man I droon twa.'"

THE first day that I fished the Till I was too busy comparing it with the kindly rivers of the South to spare a thought for the Tweed, and, besides, the Tweed was probably also blighted by the depressing drizzle which damped my early reflections, filled me with contempt for the sturdy North, and showed me what misery can be caused by the use of the dry fly. But I found out one memorable thing on that inauspicious occasion, and that is that, no matter where you find him, the grayling is a cause of stumbling to the innocent of speech. In the Till this fish was, probably is still, unsophisticated so far as the dry fly is concerned. Nevertheless, on that rainy, dismal day I enacted the same tragi-comedy that is so well known in the South. The fish came up in one pool with great regularity, rising at nothing, so to speak, for there was no insect on the water, and they utterly and absolutely disregarded my fly, though I changed it frequently, though I put it over them even unto thirty times.

In another pool I got a few small ones and some unseasonable trout, but the end of the short day convinced me that the dry fly is useless for the Till.

The next day was Sunday; the sun shone, hope arose within me, and I said to the landlord, "To-morrow I shall use the wet fly—three wet flies, and I shall put on waders—long waders." Then it was that I remembered the old rhyme, for he said, "You must be careful how you wade in the Till." It appeared that quicksands waited for the unwary, which is why Till "droons twae," or rather it is one of the reasons; others became clear to me later. At the time quicksands seemed quite enough to induce seriousness. Early on Monday came breakfast, and with it a friend from Tweedside, of cheerful countenance, and well be-wadered as to his legs, "for, of course," suggested he, "one must wade." "One must wade," I admitted, "but one must be careful." I take an unholy joy in recording that the word "quicksands" produced in him a thoughtful silence akin to my own of the day before, and, though we started with much resolution, our walk to the river was principally enlivened by discussion of places in which men sink until they are no more seen, and by exchange of recipes for getting out—which seemed inadequate. Fortunately, however, we neither of us had occasion to test them. The river proved to be rather uneasy wading, the bottom being mostly of very fine sand, but I cannot honestly own that I came upon a patch which was really quick, though there were one or two hurried exits from soft places, mostly at the side of

deep pools. How far one might have sunk experiment only could have shown, and the grayling fishing, to say nothing of other interests, might have suffered thereby.

This fishing I found to be more remunerative than on my previous attempt. I used a five-ounce nine-foot rod, a cast of three North-Country flies tied on ooo hooks and the finest gut, and fished straight upstream, looking for the stoppage of the line rather than for a rise. This, I am convinced, is wise in upstream fishing, for many a grayling takes the fly without breaking the surface at all. Were it not for seeing the line checked, the rise would pass unheeded. The shorter the line, the easier is the fishing, and the rod should be raised as the flies come downstream, so that if possible only the gut is in the water. I did not keep count of the number of grayling that I caught, but they were all very small, and out of some dozens I only kept about three brace of six-ounce fish to serve for breakfast. It was a bleak, cheerless day, with a cold, searching wind, and was by no means favourable for the fly; the river was dead low, and the bigger grayling (if there were any, of which I was not yet sure) were not moving, though my friend's catch included a pounder that took a worm, fished Nottingham-fashion, twenty-five yards away. Local fishermen depend almost entirely on the worm, and when the river is clearing after a spate they sometimes make very big baskets with it. After the long drought, however, the worm was of little use.

On the Tuesday there was again a cold wind, but

the sky was a little brighter, and the fish moved rather better. I replaced the North-Country flies with a cast consisting of a Brunton's fancy as leader, and a red tag and sylph as droppers. The first-named fly proved the most killing, and, indeed, for grayling it is hard to beat anywhere. My biggest fish was one and a quarter pounds, which I should say is a good grayling for the Till, though I saw others here and there that looked heavier. The rest, however, were small, none of them exceeding three-quarters of a pound. My friend, with the same variation of the green insect, had some five brace, averaging about half a pound. This would seem to be the standard size for Till grayling in ordinary — that is to say, bad circumstances. On a really good day the basket might average three-quarters of a pound, and be well filled at that. But no really good day fell to our lot. An interval was spent in fruitless pursuit of back-end salmon on the Tweed (one grilse failed to take a small nondescript fly—an exiguous measure of success for three days' fishing), and then we returned to the grayling in disgust.

As we returned the wind arose in its might, and blew all ways with equal vehemence, making grayling-fishing a matter for ridicule. Also the clouds sat on the hills, and so indirectly revealed to us another of Till's methods of "drooning twae." When a cloud has sat too long on a hill it bursts, and then "she" comes suddenly round the corner (Till is a most sinuous river), increased in stature by six feet, and full of haystacks, cows, and other ill-gotten gains. So, at least, said our informant. "You can hear her

coming," he added, to comfort us. But, as my friend said, one could not hear the Atlantic coming in the hurricane that prevailed, much less a mere spate, nor could one get up those steep banks in time; and, besides, one might at the moment be wrestling with a quicksand. After the wind came rain, then more wind, then more rain, then wind and rain together, and finally the spate, which, by the way, was not six feet, and came in the night. During all this grayling-fishing was almost hopeless, but by hard work I managed to get a few brace each day, and to realize what might be done under fair conditions.

The spate came down thick with the accumulated débris of the whole summer, and sickened the fish entirely, so that even the worm failed to do any good. The flood water, however, showed the third and, I hope, the last of Till's murderous methods. I was standing looking at the turbulent yellow stream, when I heard a noise as of a hundred salmon leaping at once. At the next bend I saw a commotion and waves, but nothing else. Several times in the morning I heard similar noises, and began to suspect what it was. My suspicions were confirmed when a considerable promontory on to which I was about to step suddenly collapsed into the water below, and left me on the brink. When the Till is in spate, therefore, it is wise to keep well back from its high, overhanging banks, lest drowning, or at any rate immersion, should be one's portion.

After the spate there was an interval spent on other waters, one day being devoted to some private water on the Glen, a tributary of the Till. A hurricane, of

course, blew, and made fly-fishing very difficult, but I got some four brace of decent grayling, the biggest one and a half pounds, and saw enough to convince me that the river ought to give very good sport on a fair day. It holds quite a remarkable head of brown trout for a North-Country river, and I saw numbers of good fish, landing one of quite one and a half pounds, which was hooked in the tail, and played like a vast grayling. He was returned with contumely. My last day's grayling-fishing on the Till, which had cleared by that time, upset the opinion conceived on the first, for the fish would not look at a wet fly, but came pretty well to a tiny brown spider fished dry. It was a warm, sunny day, and there was a certain amount of fly on the water. Therefore it would seem that the dry fly *is* of use on the Till.

Whether it would be worth a South-Country angler's while to go so far in pursuit of grayling would depend largely on the weather. With still, calm days and frosty nights good baskets would be almost assured; but the fish are not very large, and such weather conditions are rare among the Cheviots. However, it is something to know that the Till is most certainly a grayling river. The country, too, is most attractive, with great rolling, desolate hills standing sentinel over the winding river valley. One finds at Wooler the real Northumberland—a country of big, hardy men and magnificent air; a country in which one can march ten miles with the ease of five in the relaxing South. I never had a holiday which was more beneficial to health and appetite. Since my visit a friend of mine has been there earlier in the year,

in September and early October, and he had excellent sport, chiefly, I think, with a dry fly.

The Wooler Angling Association issues season tickets at an almost nominal figure for some four miles of the Till and a mile and a half of the Wooler water, another tributary which is also full of grayling, but which was so low during my visit as to be almost unfishable. In a fairly wet season the sea-trout and bull-trout fishing in the association water is sometimes remunerative; a fourteen-foot rod would fish the river comfortably. There is also a chance of an occasional salmon. The season for migratory fish ends on November 30, and grayling may be taken until the end of February.

XX—IN PRAISE OF CHUB

MUCH water has eddied under the bridges, foamed over the weirs, and lost itself in the Severn sea since first I came under the spell. But the water must flow longer and stronger yet to wash away recollection of that solemn time. It was high summer on Shakespeare's stream, and afternoon—poetically, it was always afternoon in a lotus-land where white canvas alone shut out the stars of night, but on this occasion prosaically also, for luncheon was over and done with—when from afar I first espied loggerhead basking at ease just outside the spreading willow. No novice was I at the sport of angling, but had taken as many brave fish as most boys of my years, with now and again a pounder among them, while I boasted acquaintance with a veteran angler who had that summer slain a cheven of full two pounds. But here was something which passed my experience—a chub of unparalleled magnitude in a land where the community spoke with respect of pounders. He had length, breadth, and dignity; he lay at the surface an imposing bulk, and for a while I stood spellbound. Then the natural boy asserted itself, and sought a plan of campaign. Now you must know that cheven

is, in some respects, the wisest of fishes, and when he suns himself at the top he is impatient of intruders. But a glimpse of Piscator or of the angle-rod outlined against the sky, and he is gone, sunk quietly out of sight and reach. Strategy, therefore, demands that Piscator should grovel, trailing the angle-rod behind, into some concealed position, whence the fly may be artfully despatched.

Like the earth-worm, I wriggled down the grassy slope to the little bush which offered the only bit of cover on the bank, and, peeping round it, found, to my relief, that loggerhead was still in view. But he was a plaguy long way off—twenty yards at least—and even had I been able to cast so far with the little nine-foot rod—"suitable to youths"—and the light line, there was the rising ground behind to frustrate me. There was nothing for it but to wait in the hope that the fish might come a little nearer. So I waited, and I will not say that a prayer was not breathed to Poseidon that he should send loggerhead towards my bank. A long time I waited—maybe half an hour or more—and the fish never moved more than an inch or two, but at long last he seemed to wake up. Some trifle of a fly attracted his attention, and I saw capacious jaws open and shut, and afterwards he seemed anxious for more, for he began to cruise slowly about. Then by slow degrees the circles of his course widened, until finally he was within about twelve yards of my bank. Now, I judged, was the time, and with a mighty effort and heart in mouth I switched out the fly at the end of my line (an artificial bluebottle, I remember) as far as I could.

It fell quite a yard short, but that mattered little. Round he came sharply to see what had happened, steadily he swam up to the bluebottle, boldly he opened his mouth, and then I drank indeed the delight of battle. Three pounds he weighed all but an ounce, which doesn't matter, and for quite a time I fondly preserved his skin, adequately peppered and salted, as I thought, but in the end elders and betters intervened with forcible remarks about nuisances. So I was left with his memory only, of which nobody could rob me.

From that day I have revered the chub, and so often as the hot summer days come round (there are not so many of them as there were when Plancus was Consul), so often do I bethink me of the sunlit waters, the cool willow shades, the fresh scent of waterweeds from the weir, the hum of bees, and, above all, the dark forms lying on the surface ready for the fly. Some there are who will give you hard words concerning the chub, having, maybe, hooked him on Wye just in the V of the currents where they fondly expected a salmon, having perchance frayed the gossamer trout-cast all to tatters in keeping his bruté strength out of the roots, and having disturbed twenty good yards of water to boot. But these unfortunates (I grant them the title) have encountered cheven out of his proper sphere, and their sympathies are warped thereby. Heed them not, but seek him in his rightful rivers, slow-flowing, rush-lined, lily-crowned, girt with willows and rich pastures; take with you your stoutest single-handed fly rod, strong gut, and big palmer flies, or coachman, alder, zulu—it matters little so the mouthful be big and so it have

a small cunning tail of white kid; go warily along the bank with eye alert for a dark form under yon clay bank, in that little round hole among the lilies, beneath that tree, above that old log—anywhere, in fact, where a worthy fish may combine ease with dignity and, possibly, nutriment. Having found him, pitch your fly at him with as much tumult as you please; if he does not see you or the rod, two to one he will rise. If he does see you he is gone, and herein lies most of the fascination of it. A stiff neck and a proud stomach are of no use to the chub-fisher, who must stoop if he wishes to conquer.

With good luck you should catch a three-pounder, among others, with very good luck a four-pounder. Those who are what Horace Walpole, I believe, called serendipitous catch a five-pounder now and again. The favoured of the gods get a six-pounder once in their lives. And one or two anglers, for whose benefit the whole cosmic scheme has evidently been arranged, have killed a seven-pounder. But this last prodigy does not, I fancy, reward fly-fishing, though I once—but the memory is too bitter to be evoked. Cheese paste is the thing for seven-pounders if you know of any such, and you can put a piece on the hook of your fly if you like. But you cannot throw it very far, the fishing is difficult, and I much doubt whether they *are* seven-pounders. Your basking chub is so imposing that one's estimate of his ounces is insensibly coloured by awe. I have ever been curious to know how big was the chub which Walton and his pupil gave to Maudlin the milkmaid. The only indication vouchsafed to us is that it was "just such another" as the

first one, with a white spot on its tail, and that was the biggest of twenty—all lying together in one hole. From this slender store of evidence I deduce it to have been two and a half pounds, because that is commonly the doyen in so numerous a shoal. The monsters do not often crowd so close as a score together. Four and five pounders are, I think, to be observed four or five in company, not more. How it may be with seven-pounders I know not; likely they swim in pairs, a pair to a mile of river, and that the best mile. I do not know of a pair, but I know of one which a good friend of mine captured in a recent year. It weighed seven pounds and a quarter, and constituted the gravest angling tragedy which has come under my notice in a decade, for the month was May, and my friend is a very honest man. So the monster was gently returned, and some day will no doubt be the father of all the chub.

Loggerhead is a noble, pleasant fish, of thoughtful habit, and he gives right good sport to those who seek him with discretion, but he has, they say, his weak points. On the table—yet is this an angler's matter? All that concerns Piscator in the treatise of culinary wisdom is surely the first injunction, "First catch him." Caught, I have never found him otherwise than welcome to the descendants of sweet-throated Maudlin. It needs to inquire no further.

The finest sport I have ever had with chub was on a kind of April day set by accident in the middle of August. The wind blew with a certain amount of vehemence from the south-west; it was none too warm, and the lights and shadows caused by alterna-

tion of sunshine and cloud were far more suggestive of spring than of summer. It would have been an excellent day for trout, but it hardly promised great sport with chub. Still, the fortnight of August that had preceded this April day had provided no chub weather worth mentioning. What sun there had been was of pale and watery complexion, with great cloud-banks hovering near, ready to obscure him if he showed any sign of cheerfulness at all. The wind also had been cold and violent, and fly-fishing had been a mockery.

The April day, therefore, was at least an improvement, and the split-cane rod was put together with more cheerfulness of spirit. It would not be a case of stalking fish scientifically, for they would hardly be on the surface; but there was a chance that a big fly thrown into likely spots might bring up a brace or two of decent chub, and give the angler something to show for his pains. In these incredulous days it is sadly necessary to have something to show, and I was growing a little tired of explaining to the lay mind that success cannot be commanded when the weather is unpropitious. Besides, it is thankless work giving explanations that are obviously misunderstood. Accordingly I was resolute to catch something when I reached the bridge that spanned the Thames—here a mere infant river—with two small arches.

Under the bridge the stream rippled in a manner provokingly suggestive of trout; but though there is much water that might well hold a head of fario in the topmost reaches of the river, the head of fario is conspicuously wanting. A trout has occasionally been

taken as high as this, but Lechlade, a good deal lower down, is the first point where the fish becomes a calculable possibility. Beyond regretting this fact, therefore, I took no thought of trout, but looked upstream for a sign of rising chub. Above the sharp water at the bridge is a long, quiet pool, and in its lower corner, on the left bank, is a clump of bushes growing right down into the water, and forming a splendid harbour. A rise was soon seen just below the bushes, and then another, and presently it became evident that the fish were moving. Leaving the bridge, I got into the meadow opposite, from which it was possible to attain a small strip of shingle below, and within casting distance of the bushes. Before the edge was approached, however, some twenty yards of line were pulled off the reel and anointed with deer's fat. Since the chub were rising, they might just as well be attacked with a dry fly. This is, perhaps, an unnecessary refinement for chub; and, indeed, it is not by any means always that they will take a floating fly properly, but when they do the sport is not to be despised.

Preparations complete, and a biggish coachman oiled and attached to a cast that tapered to the finest undrawn gut, the river was approached, and the attack begun. The strip of shingle was about fifteen yards from the last bush, and the distance was soon found. Then the fly dropped close to the submerged twigs. There was no delay on the part of the chub, for a heavy fish plunged at the coachman the instant it touched the water. So sudden was the response that the line was not released by the fingers holding it

against the rod-butt, and a vigorous strike proved too much for the gut. Another plunge, and the chub was gone with the coachman. This was vexatious, for the loss of a fish that has been hooked generally frightens the shoal. The rule is not quite invariable, however, so another fly was put on and cast a little higher up, in the hope that the other chub might not have noticed the little contretemps. This seemed to be the case, for a rise followed immediately. There was no mistake about the strike this time, and the reel screamed as the hook went home, continuing to scream as the fish dashed off. A chub's first rush is formidable, and with fine gut it is no good trying to stop it; but if the fish does not break, then it ought to be landed safely and speedily. Before long the fight was over, and a fish of one and a half pounds was in the net, tapped on the head, and thrown out into the meadow, where the creel had been left.

Then the fly was again thrown towards the bushes. Another fish took it immediately, and was landed in the same manner as the first, to which it might have been a twin brother. Then two smaller ones, of about one and a quarter pounds, each came to the net, and were returned. In a good chub river nothing under one and a half pounds is really worth keeping, unless local taste in the matter of fish-diet is very responsive; but big chub will sometimes find grateful recipients in the country, as will be seen. After the brace of small ones had been returned a two-pounder was landed, and after that several more fish of about one and a half pounds. By the end of half an hour there must have been a dozen or more on the bank, and the sport

showed no sign of slackening. Another two-pounder was just in the net when an exclamation was heard from the bridge. A cyclist had paused to look on, and was much impressed with the sight of somebody actually catching something. "What a beauty!" he said, as the chub was thrown out into the meadow after the rest. This remark suggested that a heaven-sent opportunity was at hand. "Would you care about some fish?" I asked guilelessly. The cyclist nodded with strange enthusiasm, and was warmly pressed to help himself. He clambered down over the wall with his mackintosh cape, into which he packed the fish with some grass. He was full of gratitude at being told to take them all, and departed, bearing some twenty pounds of chub at his saddle-bow, and leaving me to reflect that appreciation of true merit is hard to find, but when found, pleasant to contemplate.

After he had gone fishing was resumed. A fish plunged at the coachman, but would not take it. It was so obviously bigger than anything caught so far that it seemed worth while to change the fly, and several patterns were tried in vain. At last a wet fly, a big alder, with a wash-leather tail, was put on, and cast in with a plop just where the fish had risen. A wave came out from the bushes at once, the line tightened, and a gentle strike fastened the hook into something better worth catching. The fish showed plenty of fight, but after one rush under the twigs, from which a steady strain brought it out, there was no real danger, and before long a plump three-pounder was landed. He was deemed worthy of a place in the big creel, and was accordingly killed and put in. After

this sport with the wet fly was quite as brisk as it had been with the coachman, and the fish were bigger—nothing under two pounds, and the biggest weighing three and a half pounds. To sum up, by the time the rise was over the twenty-two-pound creel was full to the brim, and half a dozen chub beside had to be carried home on a withy twig. All these fish, weighing, with those given away, at least fifty pounds, had been caught without moving from the strip of shingle, and without fishing more than fifteen yards of water, which only shows how chub may be caught when they are really on the feed. The last cast provoked a curious conclusion to a wonderful morning. A fish followed the fly just like a chub, took it, and was played to the net, when it proved to be a small pike of about two and a half pounds. It gave a last kick as the net was about to receive it, the frayed gut parted, and the fly which had caught so many fish vanished for ever.

XXI—A DAY ON CHALKLEY'S

THE young workman was enthusiastic and very ready to help, and, on the principle that a man who lives in a land of streams should naturally know how to net a fish, the net was detached from its ring, opened, and delivered over. But repentance followed immediately, as the son of toil jabbed fiercely at the slender thread of gut connecting angler and trout. It was plain that locale of habitation did not in itself imply dexterity of hand. Fortunately the fish, resenting the well-meant interference, had bolted out into midstream again; the net was kindly but firmly taken from the unskilful one, and in a few moments a trout of one pound five ounces was on the bank, and being regarded not without gratification. "This last month," said the workman, "I have gone up and down here to my dinner every day, and never seen anybody catch anything before." To which the angler replied, with some solemnity: "And that one took an hour and a half to catch." But the significance of this was lost on the workman, sympathetic though he was; the beauty of a change of fly evidently did not appeal to him, and, moreover, it was after 2 p.m., and he was late for his work.

So he departed, and the angler was left to meditate on the doctrines of perseverance, which are the only doctrines worth remembering on the College Fishery, better known to fame, perhaps, as "Chalkley's." The fish now in the bag had been an inmate of the side-stream which anglers know as the "millpond." With sundry others he had been smutting all the morning, and he had rejected, as had the others, practically every known pattern of winged fly, together with several different varieties of what tackle-makers fondly imagine to be the curse, though no tackle-maker that was ever apprenticed has yet been able to devise anything which is sufficiently accursed, and yet has some hooking power. At last, however, there dimly awoke the memory of words written by one who was trained on the water, and who has left a great reputation behind him. The fly-box was taken out once more, and the flies were again considered. A small black fly with very sparse soft hackle was found, tied on, and presented to the fish, which took it at once. Several other black hackle flies had been tried before, but all had been abundantly and rather stiffly dressed, and the incident seems to show that one black fly is not always as good as another, even though they be of the same apparent size. Having arrived at this conclusion, the angler went off to a belated lunch.

Between lunch and tea the wind blew, thunder was imminent, the public passed, repassed, and passed again along the footpath which skirts the millpond, while the dogs belonging to the public plunged merrily into the water nicely within casting distance. Also there came two, one on each bank, with a weed-cutting

apparatus, consisting of ropes and scythe-blades. Therefore, the discovery of the soft black hackle fly could not be put to a really satisfactory test. It deceived, however, some two and a half brace of little fish besides a brace of tiny grayling; all these were, of course, returned, and they at least afforded some occupation. Over in the college cricket-ground much cricket was being played, and the eye was apt to wander from the water to the match ground, where the captain of Haverford College was showing what can be done against British bowling, and playing a magnificent uphill game. Moreover, there was a Wykehamist fishing.[1] He had, he said, caught twenty sizeable trout on the fishery during the term, which is no small achievement on that water when the exigencies of public-school life, so feelingly described by Sir Edward Grey, are taken into account. With the coming of the evening rise, the Winchester boy has to go, and thus he loses the best hour of the summer day. But the disability probably helps to teach him to fish; he has to make the best use of his spare time, and he wastes none of it, like the rest of us, in idling. Certainly there was little in the theory of dry-fly fishing that this young fisherman did not know, and the way he handled his rod testified to his practice.

After tea, what had been merely a passing and re-passing of the public and its dogs became a procession,

[1] John Hamilton Mitchell, probably the most successful fisherman Winchester has produced since Sir Edward Grey. In the season of 1905 he killed forty-five trout on Chalkley's water. Those who have read Sir Edward Grey's book will realize what that means. Untimely death cut short a career of more than usual promise while he was still at the school.

and there was a good deal of splashing. It ought to have been amusing to watch a bevy of small girls competing in weight-putting, the objective being the water, and the weights stones larger than any that one would have thought small girls could lift in these degenerate days. But amusement was tempered with sorrow, for were not those mighty stones descending upon the heads of certain trout marked down in the morning? It is a bold man who remonstrates with small girls, and a bolder who dries his fly in dangerous proximity to the charming faces of their elder sisters, who with attendant swains formed more than a nucleus of the procession. Flight, therefore, was plainly the wisest course, though one or two local rods, by this time arrived, seemed to regard their surroundings with philosophy and to fish on unmoved. On the other side of the meadow lies Old Barge, and here the angler may be undisturbed, for between the two streams the water-meadow is very watery indeed, and the public would get wet if it walked there. The angler does get wet, for the ditches are innumerable, and hard to avoid in the long grass.

Old Barge is not easy to fish. The trout seem to make a point of feeding just on the other side of a small clump of rushes or bed of weeds. It is impossible to reach them from below, and almost impossible to cover them without a drag from a point opposite. One such fish, however, was at last covered, after a fashion, by means of a very slack line, and he took the soft black hackle like a lamb, fought gamely for his size, and was netted at a precarious and swampy corner. He was respectably over the limit of three-quarters of

a pound, though he was not one pound, and was added to the bag. Then at least an hour was spent in trying different flies over a feeding and visible fish of about one and a half pounds. With him the black hackle was useless, though he came up and inspected it once or twice. Ginger, red, and olive quills he allowed to pass by in motionless contempt. To a Wickham he moved once, but half-heartedly. At other winged flies he would not look. At long last Tupp's indispensable roused his curiosity, and he followed it some way downstream twice. The third time he took it at least a yard below his haunt, but the line had bagged, the strike failed, and he was one more fish in a long list of trout put down.

After this a succession of flies was tried over a trout rising further out on the edge of a weed-bed. He bulged once at the black hackle, scorned the rest, and the case seemed hopeless. But a kind providence suggested a trial of the blue upright on a oo hook, and this succeeded where its acknowledged betters had failed. The trout came tumbling across a neck of weeds, and was in the net almost before he had realized his predicament—another reasonably sizeable fish like the last. After this there were two misfortunes—one fish pricked, and another hit too hard, with the consequent loss of the fly. The fine point was taken off and replaced by one of undrawn gut; and a new fly accounted for a fourth fish in the twilight—a dark but well-shaped fellow of one and a half pounds. This ended the evening's fishing; and though on some waters not far away the bag would seem but a small one, for the College Fishery two brace were as many

as a moderate man could desire, and more than he deserved. The success of hackle flies alone on a water[1] where winged flies are used almost exclusively may be no more than a curious and isolated incident, but, on the other hand, it may suggest that novelty is sometimes useful in circumventing highly-educated trout.

[1] Since this chapter was written "Chalkley's" is "Chalkley's" no longer. A fishing club has been started in the school, and has acquired the rights over this historic water. It was the last bit of the Itchen on which day-tickets could be got by payment.

XXII—THE AUTUMN SALMON

THERE are high-souled persons who call him a "red brute," and so dismiss him from their scheme of things. There are statisticians who compile treatises to prove that, even if he be not red—it is difficult for the high-souled themselves to find much externally amiss with the bright, new-run fish of Tweed even in November—he ought to be left alone in the interest of the fisheries. But there is a new sixteen-foot greenheart just come from its maker, the old favourites are receiving their preparatory coat of varnish, the fly-books are open on table, a letter about the state of the river is in pocket, October has arrived —in short, objectors and objections are neither here nor there, as the vague but effective argument hath it. After all, it is not wholly cynical to assume that a high soul in salmon matters is a symptom of spare time, full coffers, and spring rivers. Possibly, too, it has some connection with a gun. As for the statistician, he must always be proving something, and is not to be appeased anyhow. If we did give up our autumn fishing, error would creep into the river for certain. Who knows but that something would prove to be wrong with the law of the survival of the fittest? The

statistician has our hearty respect. When he talks of netting in narrow waters and its evils he talks of the thing that is. Even the curtailment of autumn rod-fishing is a topic of legitimate discussion, academically and at a suitable season; but just now the river calls, and his voice is drowned in the roar of waters.

Heaven send that the waters do roar, by the way, when we come to them, not, as at this moment, like sucking doves, nor, as last year, like sabre-toothed monsters (which I conceive to have had a particularly full-throated note), but moderately, like some half-grown lion of Afric. Then shall the fish be on the alert, running neither too much nor too little, showing themselves from time to time (the sign may be bad, as some say, but it is at least a comfort to know that they are there), and taking well under water with the decision that means business. A too full river in autumn is a sorry state of things, for the fish simply run a race for the head waters, and the angler has nothing to do but look on. Whatever the eyes with which they regard the sport, hostile or friendly, all will admit that it is not a race meeting; when all you see of the competitors is an occasional long shape slithering sideways on a shallow, you cannot even wager on the result. Just one chance of stopping a fish is there—one slender chance. Station yourself by a narrow rapid which you can cover easily, and flog away in the quieter water at its side with a two-inch Wilkinson or Silver Doctor, or some such visible fly, or, more likely still, with some glittering spinning bait —a copper and silver spoon-bait one and a half inches long shows up rarely in heavy water. But on some

rivers the order is "fly only," and there you might really just as well give it up, were it not for the abiding truth about the "flee aye in the watter." Perhaps that is the only truth in salmon-fishing on which one can lay fast hold; the rest of it is mystery, uncertainty, and ignorance.

Even more does this one truth shine forth when the water is dead low, a condition much to be preferred to the constant semi-flood, if there has been rain within a reasonable time. The fish are there in the pools—sulky maybe, but still there; red maybe, but still there; you may have covered them with a dozen flies and had never a touch, but they are still there. How important this is can only be fully realized by those who have waited about by a river when the fish were not there. With salmon in the pools perseverance may at any time meet with its reward. Given a good blustering south-west wind with a brisk feel in the air, one need never be daunted by low water. Even a calm, bright day has its time of dusk, and that time its possibilities. It sometimes happens that one has lost heart just before the twilight half-hour comes, and it is very difficult to whip one's zeal on to the necessary last effort. It is some sort of remedy to leave one pool unfished till the evening, and to seek it after despair has entered one's soul. The sight of an untried pool is a wonderful stimulant which will keep one going till dark. And if at the last moment a fish takes, the sensation is supreme. Night is so near that no law can be given. A strain is applied which would seem sheer madness at midday, but all holds, the fish is kept from the rapids by pure force, plays doggedly in the pool, and at length is on

the bank with the last glimmer of daylight, a fifteen-pounder landed in ten minutes.

That "the play's the thing" seems to be the general opinion with regard to salmon-fishing, and that, no doubt, is why the lofty soul despises the autumn fish. It is true that in October as a rule a salmon shows not the wildness it would have shown in March. There are exceptions, but I am not concerned to cite them, because the wildness of a fish has never impressed me so much as its strength. It is awe-inspiring to have to do with something which you cannot turn a hair's breadth out of its course even with the big rod and strong tackle. A salmon hanging thoughtfully motionless out in a stream which would bear the strongest swimmer away, with a side-strain on him which would move a heavy boat, is an opponent worthy of one's muscle. But the sensation which one gets out of the fish's play is not the only one in the sport. There is what is called the "rug," an onomatopœic word which suggests not ill the low-toned vibration that passes up the line and rod to the hand, and causes the whole being of the angler to respond with exquisite emotion, half excitement, half fear. There is the first sight of the fish, only gained after several minutes of hard work, and the estimate of his weight. And, finally, there is the pure bliss of victory. If there be a more poignant triumph among human affairs than the serene session in company with the first fish of the season under the lea of the gorse-bush, I do not know it. Truly, at that moment life has no more to offer, except it be another salmon. On the companion picture, which represents a straightened rod, a slackened line, a boil in the water

where the fish rolled over with such dire result, and a human being whose countenance is filled with blank dismay, I prefer not to dwell. The loss of a salmon is terrible, of the first salmon unspeakable. *Absit omen!*

What it may be like to kill a round dozen of salmon in one day I do not know; the experience is not for everybody. But I do know that one can enjoy oneself passing well without killing any. The handling of a good rod is in itself a pleasure; the pages of one's fly-book are a feast of colour for the eye; and the river is music in the ears. To the city-dweller the keen air coming round the bluff of yon purple-crowned mountain is elixir of life. Crag, heather, space and solitude—these are medicines for the ills of his mind. For his body there is exercise. After the first day's fishing, during which one has waded deep and flogged with all the zest of a year's pent-up desire, there comes an aching which is marvellously minute. Every individual joint, muscle and sinew has its share, and the pleasure and pride of it are intense. Some feeling of the sort must have rewarded our forefathers after the tourney. And the sleep that follows dinner and tobacco is the soundest one is like to enjoy this side of Lethe.

These are perforce modest times, and we go north or west prepared for small things. If we get a salmon each day, with perhaps one bag of three or four on some great occasion, we shall return triumphant. If we get but two salmon in each week, we shall not be ill pleased; if but two in the whole time, not absolutely downcast. If—but there is no need to anticipate evil. As to redness, a fish is a fish for all that. Beautiful he

may not be, but we know that beauty is but skin-deep, a delusion, a fatal gift, a thing of nought. We also know that a fish can be made much more presentable by being wrapped in a cloth all night. And really we want to know nothing more, except how to catch him.

XXIII—A RUN OF LUCK

IN the fat pastures of the South one is lulled, I suppose, into a kind of false security. Cows in a water-meadow are but agricultural commonplaces; bullocks are pieces of scenery as placid as willow-trees; even bulls are objects of respect rather than awe—I have often of late years fished in close proximity to a bull without a tremor. Therefore I went into Wales unafraid, and quite forgetful that in the old days, albeit no runner at any time, I have covered considerable tracts of the Principality in a remarkably brief tale of seconds. But on Sunday (I arrived on Saturday) I remembered. My very good friend Glendower was giving me the benefit of his eight years' experience of the river, showing me the pools and catches, and generally preparing me for a possible salmon when we should have water—at present there was none, or almost none. We had walked past several pools and climbed many stiles, and were just upon returning for luncheon when we came face to face with a dark red bull. It had a morose expression and a sombre eye, and I bethought me instantly of the old days, and prepared to lower all my records. But my friend is a big man and a brave; he addressed the animal in

a most terrible voice, and with commanding gesture, and it moved slowly away. That is why I call him Glendower henceforth; the mantle of the district's departed hero has undoubtedly fallen upon him. For my own part memory was now awake and active, and thereafter I went about with great caution.

On the morrow I put on waders, took a seventeen-foot rod, and proceeded to fish the pools to which I had been introduced. Prospects were almost hopeless. The river is not of great reputation at any time, and there had been no flood sufficient to bring fish up to the higher reaches for some weeks. In fact, I had had all due warnings, and was possessed of the disheartening knowledge that but nine salmon had been killed by as many rods so far during the season. Still, I was there to fish, and it was as well to get into training at once, especially as slight rain was falling, and we might, with luck, get water before long. I needed training. After the first pool I perspired; after the second I panted; and after the third I ached. And for all my toil I had but a single half-hearted pluck at a tiny Jock Scott—from a trout, I fancied. Not a salmon did I see or feel. I came to the conclusion at last that there were none. Also I resented the rain in the inconsistent way that one does resent arrangements which are for one's ultimate good. I resented other things, too. There was an old kettle in the water just by a footbridge; its spout pointed upstream, and its handle was about two inches above the surface. I was indignant that the populace should throw rubbish into rivers, and might have waded in to remove the disfigurement had I not

resented the idea of doing other people's dirty work. But most and deepest I resented the stiles, which were innumerable. After the third pool I climbed five in quick succession. The sixth stopped me. It was a terrible erection, and for all I knew was but the beginning of a series. No salmon-pool on the river was worth the labour, and I turned firmly round for home. At the footbridge I stopped to take off my cast and wind up my line. It had been a wretched day.

Just as I came to this conclusion, and was about to depart by the lane, I caught sight of the kettle in the water. Somehow it made me pause; it looked different. Yes, its spout had turned round, and was now pointing downstream; its handle was almost under water. The river was rising! Perhaps I now had a chance. Profoundly though I ached, I threaded the line through the rod-rings and put on the cast again, deciding to give the second and most likely pool another trial. It was a quarter of a mile away, but I hurried over the distance, eager to try the effect of that first half-hour of waxing water. It was after 5 p.m. when, having tied on a medium-sized Silver Wilkinson, I got in at the head of the stream that flowed under the bushes into the pool. Fishing steadily down, I came at last to the spot where I was sure a salmon would be lying if there was one anywhere—the point at which the stream suddenly deepened into the pool. The fly worked round into the eddy, and just in the slack water the pull came, and I was fast in a fish. I forgot all about aches and weariness as the reel screamed, got out on to the shingly beach, and settled down to a period of

thrilling enjoyment and as much activity as might be needed.

This was not, as it turned out, too much, for the salmon played deep and sullenly in the heavy current. For quite ten minutes I got no sight of him, and we had a ding-dong fight of give and take within an area of about forty yards of deep water. Then he came to the top, and I saw his tail before he started off downstream. The pool was divided into two parts by some thirty yards of shallow water, which was broken here and there by boulders. The idea of his employing them strategically did not commend itself; taking the risk, I dropped the rod-point so as to put on as heavy a side-strain as I could. After a moment of suspense the manœuvre succeeded; he turned and went back to the deep water. From that point the battle was won, though it was nearly ten minutes more before I dared shift the rod to my left hand and prepare for using the gaff. At last the chance came; the fish turned on his side, and in a moment I had him safely on the grass. That he was a comely fish I will not pretend. An elderly male salmon, whose arrival dates probably from August, has few good looks in October. But he weighed nineteen pounds, and was a long way better than nothing. I had no string to tie him head and tail; there was a mile between me and home. I will confess that I stuck the gaff through the fish's jaw and towed him along the grass from stile to stile, and each time he had to be lifted over (there were, I think, eleven times) I ached more than ever.

The next day was a day of instruction, for my friend

came out with me and took me over the lower half of the water. The river had risen a good deal, and was rather thick. We fished cursorily down several pools without result, and walked past others until we came to the bottom of the water. Here is a long narrow pool of good repute. It is, indeed, the favourite beat on the fishery, and generally holds a few salmon when there are any in the river. But we fished it down carefully in turn without result, and then took a rest, coming to the conclusion that the water was now too thick for the fly. Then came an instance of the uncertainties of salmon-fishing. I took his rod down to the river just to try its action, and got out a few yards of line. At about the third cast there was a boil in the water, and a good fish came up at the fly, a silver-bodied, turkey-winged creation designed for the Tweed. We rested the fish, and then Glendower went down over him with the same fly. There was no response, but about twenty yards lower another salmon came up in the same way. Both fish had seen the fly before without apparently taking any notice of it. After that we tried several other patterns, but moved nothing, and at last we decided to go over the pool with a small spoon and then make for home. My friend went down first and did not get a touch. I followed him after an interval, and had not covered a third of the distance when I was into a salmon, a fairly bright hen fish of sixteen and a half pounds, which my friend gaffed out in splendid style after about ten minutes' fight. Luck was never more in evidence, for the fish must have seen the first spoon as well as the second, both being of the same size and nature.

On the two following days the river rose steadily, and was very muddy, and fishing was out of the question, though we made a few futile casts on the Wednesday. On Friday, however, it had cleared, and we fished in earnest. Again luck had its own way. Glendower fished down a pool in masterly fashion, while I sat and rested, admiring his clean casting and long line. But he got no touch, and went on to the next pool, leaving me to go over the water with another fly—the Tweed fly already mentioned. The longed-for pull came about a third of the way down, and I played and duly gaffed a fish that might have been twin sister to the fish of Tuesday, sixteen and a half pounds, and not more red than was becoming. I got no other touch that day, but I was quite satisfied. Saturday was a day of events, but not for me. One rod killed a fish of twenty pounds; my friend Glendower hooked and lost a big one, the fly coming away after some eight minutes of battle; and a third angler had the ill-luck to lose two, one of them breaking him. I myself fished some pools higher than any I had yet visited, but could not get a rise, and, moreover, there were certain kine with long horns which regarded me with marked disfavour. I carried off the situation by pretending that my rod was a stock-whip, but I was relieved for once by the sight of a stile.

All next week the water dwindled. Monday was a blank. On Tuesday I had one rise at a small Silver Doctor, but the fish never meant taking. On Wednesday the same fly gained another rise of the same inconclusive kind. On Thursday I took train and visited a stretch of water some miles downstream, in

which was a pool that yields better than most when the stream is low. In this pool I saw three fish jump, tried them in vain with various flies, and at last put a spoon over them. All three came at it, but only one meant business, a strong but ugly little cock of seven and a half pounds. That was the only capture, but I regarded the day as well filled, for I got two rises in other pools, one with a Wilkinson and the other with a small, dark fly whose name I know not. The morrow stimulated one fish only to move in a pool where I had hitherto seen nothing, but the stimulus was not enough to make him take. On Saturday it blew a gale from the south-west and rained at intervals. My rod and I disagreed. I was all for the fly, but the seventeen feet of greenheart refused to throw it straight, and tied three knots for me in the single gut. I undid them patiently, took the implied hint, and put on the spoon, which certainly went out better across the wind. It also caught a fish of twelve pounds, and so made my total five salmon in a fortnight—no bad result when fish were so few and sulky.

It rained all night, and the river rose about a foot on Sunday. It dropped again in the night, and there was a slight frost. On Monday I found it intensely cold, having to get out of the water every half-hour or so and stamp about to get warm. I was fishing the top pool of the water, which was in fair order. But the wind was trying, and there were more knots in the cast. Again I had to take to the spoon, and again it served me well, as I killed a fish of seven and a half pounds with it. I had seen him rise twice as though he were a taker, but he had refused at intervals the Tweed fly,

a Durham Ranger, a Thunder and Lightning, a Grey Eagle, a fancy of my own with a gold body, red-brown wing, gold topping, and red tail, and a local fly of sober hue. I was glad to get that fish at last. On Tuesday I found the river falling fast, but most of the pools were still in order, and the weather was perfect for salmon-fishing. I fished down six before luncheon without a touch, though four of them were in perfect condition, and looked as though they must yield. Then I ate my sandwiches at the side of the seventh, a high-water pool, which was much too low according to local ideas. Still, it seemed to me worth a trial, as there was enough stream at the head, and, having eaten, I went down it with a medium-sized Thunder and Lightning. The proceeding was justified. A fish came at the fly with a bang before I had covered thirty yards, and gave me an excellent, though anxious, ten minutes. By the horrid way he shook his head and his frequent plunges at the top I knew he must be lightly hooked. What is the correct procedure for an angler when his fish shakes his head at him and sends cold shivers up his spine? The question occurred to me at the time, as it seems to occur to everyone, but I could recall no axiom of any merit; I do not believe there is one that covers the problem. I played that fish with the greatest courtesy. If he wanted line, he had it, though he never got any of it slack; if he desired to move to another part of the pool, he moved, and I moved with him; never was a salmon humoured more to his taste. At last he chose to come slowly inshore, there to meditate on some new departure. And this was the only advantage I took of him. While he meditated, by no

means beaten, I quietly reached out with the gaff, and by great good luck got the stroke in as he turned. The fly came away as I carried him up the bank!

So pleased was I with this result that I demanded no more of fortune that day, little dreaming how kind she was to prove. I laid the ten-pounder out under a furze-bush, smoked a pipe in great contentment, and then fished the pool down again, caring little whether I moved another or not. And in precisely the same spot I got into a second salmon, which went off with a fine rush and jumped like a spring fish. This was a heavier one, but there was no jiggering, and I dared to put on a greater strain. In about twelve minutes there were two fish lying under the furze-bush; the second drew the spring balance down to fourteen and a quarter pounds. After this I smoked the most joyful pipe I have smoked for a long time. Two fish in a day from that water were matter enough to smoke about. And then I went over the pool again, though I did not believe it contained any more salmon. But against all probability there was yet a third fish. It was only a small one of four and a half pounds, but it was a third fish, and as such a kind of miracle. Had my load been composed of coals or potatoes I should have grumbled at the long walk between me and the station. As it was I rejoiced in the weight, and even fished two more pools on the way downstream.

At last, about 5 p.m., I came to divided ways. One led to the station, and I could just catch a train; the other would take me to a pool which was seldom fished, but whose appearance I had liked well. Deciding on the more arduous part and a later train, I

clambered with my load over the stile, and plodded across a meadow to the pool. It was narrow and deep, with a strong stream running between high banks. The wading was awkward, and the switch cast was imperative. I did not expect a rise here, but I got it with the Thunder and Lightning, just as out of the tail of my eye I caught sight of the river-watcher with his hands uplifted in astonishment over my three fish. I had enough to do this time. The salmon was both strong and wild, the stream was heavy, and the light was failing. Once I had to keep the fish out of the rapids by main force. Had it not been for Hughie's fortunate arrival, I do not think that sixteen-pounder would have been mine; but he gaffed it out for me almost in the darkness, and I went home elated. Only once before within his memory had four fish been killed on that water in a day.

One more salmon fell to my lot—another sixteen-pounder—which gave me a rare fight on the next evening. I gaffed it only just in time, as it was quite dusk before it was beaten. After this we had frosts every night; the river fell very quickly, and I caught nothing more, though I lost a small fish on the Saturday just at the gaff's point. Still, I feel that with eleven salmon in three weeks I had my share of good fortune. Bearing in mind the badness of the season, the scarcity of fish, and the consistent ill-luck of other anglers much more expert than myself, I can only endorse Hughie's oft-repeated comment: "Well, you *are* the lucky angler, whatever."

XXIV—WEIR-POOLS

IT has something to do with the liveliness of the falling water, I suspect, that the weir-pool is so beloved of anglers. The open reaches can be, and often are, so dull when fish are out of humour or of doubtful numbers. After watching an undisturbed float, or casting a futile spinning-bait or fly for a number of hours, one is apt to lose heart about the business, and regard the unchanged, yet ever-changing, expanse of water with a jaundiced eye. Why on earth should fish in such monotonous surroundings ever bite, or run, or rise? Why, indeed, should fish be there at all? Why should a man be Bœotian enough to try and catch them, making of the practice of angling a mere iteration of purposeless manual exercises? At this point one would be quite likely to pack up and go home, were it not for the sudden remembrance of the weir-pool. Why, yes, of course, there is exactly what one wants: foam, turmoil, eddies, old piles, little commotions in the distance that look like feeding fish, shoals of minnows close to the camp sheathing, and all the variety that can charm a soul oppressed by too much sameness. So one shoulders the creel and goes thither at once.

Being come to the weir-pool, does one get sport? Here I confess I am minded to answer cautiously, after the fashion of those beyond the border. Such a statement as "whiles" about expresses the facts. If the fish are not feeding elsewhere there is not likely to be great slaughter at the weir-pool; conversely, if there is great slaughter at the weir-pool, a small sum might be safely wagered that they are feeding with considerable heartiness in other places, which would seem to destroy the foundations of one's faith in the foam, turmoil, eddies, and all the rest of it. But the cautious answer does not, after all, quite cover the question, because it takes no account of the occasional fish, of which, my experience has been, the normal weir-pool is more generous than the normal open reach. I believe one can generally get some proof of the existence of fish in a weir-pool in the shape of bites or what not, even though elsewhere no signs have been vouchsafed.

I remember once exploring a little brook, narrow, sluggish, and sinuous, which had the reputation of holding quite large trout. It was somewhat heavily bushed, and possessed some likely pools and corners, into most of which I insinuated a March brown in the orthodox wet-fly manner. But never a fish did I move or even see, except one small one that fled off a bit of gravelly shallow, and I began to think that the brook's reputation was fallacious, and my informant something worse. At last, however, I came to a mill, no longer worked, but still dividing the stream into two channels. One of these began with a six-foot fall, over which a mere trickle of water splashed on to a

large flat stone, and so into a little pool, perhaps twenty feet long and fifteen feet wide. The water was not more than three feet deep at the most, and the bottom was covered practically everywhere with a dense growth of silkweed, which showed how little stream had passed through that summer. Still, such as it was, the place was a weir-pool, and caused hope to revive slightly. The best spot was, of course, where the trickle came over the stone, and made a slight disturbance in the pool; and there, sure enough, a good fish rose as soon as the fly fell. After a brisk fight, complicated by silkweed, it came to the net, and proved to be nearly two pounds. The pool also yielded a small trout of a few ounces, which was returned, and, after an interval of rest, a third of over a pound, thus making something like a good day out of what had seemed a certain blank.

At the time I thought it probable that there were hardly any trout in the other parts of the brook, and that the few survivors of rustic attack had taken up their quarters in the most favoured spots, such as the weir-pools and mill-pounds—a thing I had noticed in another very similar brook; but on subsequent visits I found that there was a fair head of fish after all, catching a few and seeing others. Therefore I am inclined to ascribe the success to the merits of the weir-pool as such. And other instances of a similar kind might be adduced, as, for instance, a nice little dish of quarter-pound trout taken during a time of great dearth in Wales, when the main river was yielding practically nothing. But an insignificant tributary burn was found with several little falls at

short intervals, and from each little pool came one or two little trout, but none from any other part of the stream. Weir-pools, strictly speaking, they were not, but the incident has some bearing on the subject. Then, again, one might dwell on the chalk-stream, and the frequency with which one finds a fish rising in a weir-pool or a hatch-hole when nothing is stirring elsewhere. Frequently has a well-oiled fly cast at a venture on the rough water fetched up a decent fish and helped a meagre basket, to say nothing of the alder or March brown, which in times of stress has achieved like result without aid of oil. The wet fly in the hatch-hole is—but perhaps I had better indicate it only, and so pass on.

Are trout which live in turbulent waters possessed of better appetites than those of the still places, or is it merely that the angler's lure is better disguised? Possibly both questions lead to some portion of the truth. Possibly, too, the angler himself contributes to his own success by his confident attitude. Even in a sport where so incalculable a quantity as fishes' appetite or mood has to be considered, the mental condition of the fisher is not without its importance. If a man is keen and confident he loses no chances, neglects no likely spots, and does not think it too much trouble to change his method or lure if things are not going briskly. When the edge of his keenness has worn off, as after the unremunerative hours by the open reach mentioned before, he continues to fish but half-heartedly, and so may be partly responsible for continued ill-luck.

Some weir-pools there are, I know from sad ex-

perience, in which sport is not likely to be better than in the reaches above or below them, but that is because anglers are so fond of them that they are always fishing there. Even in the foam of the fall fish can acquire a surprising knowledge of hooks, dressings, and gut; but for a weir-pool to be no more productive than any other given part of the river it must, I should say, have been considerably harder fished. The Thames weir-pools are hard enough fished, in all conscience, yet they give a surprising amount of sport to their many devotees. Nor can one wonder, apart from that, that they are favourite spots, for they have their own magic. The great river thundering over all barriers to the sea, the thought of those mighty trout, barbel, chub, and perch, which surely inhabit the mysterious depths, the play of sunlight in the foam, the faint, sweet scent of water-weeds, nowhere so noticeable as near the fall—all these are reasons enough why one should love to ply the angle here above all places. The open reaches are lovely and desirable at their proper times, but to the weir-pool one always returns at the last.

XXV—TRIANGLES: A PIKE-FISHER'S LAMENT

IN the United States, we are told, there is a movement afoot for the abolition of the triangle—not Euclid's (though one can imagine supporters for even so fierce a scheme as that), but piscator's. There are times when that movement, as reported, has my sympathy, and this is one of them. I endeavoured a while back to get pike tackle into some sort of order before a contemplated expedition with Caradoc, who is a sceptic in the matter of pike-fishing. To that end I cleared a piece of table, and placed upon it—(A) a long cardboard box purporting to hold spinning flights; (B) another long cardboard box supposed to contain live-bait tackles; (C) a third cardboard box—contents doubtful, but heavy, and therefore to be overhauled; (D) a tin box holding spoons; (E) another tin box and more spoons; (F) another tin box containing phantoms, a big Devon or so, and "assorted" baits; (G) a very large cardboard box holding cobbler's wax, silk, wire, thread, swivels, spare hooks, and other necessities for tackle-making; (H) an indiarubber fish armed with three triangles. These things represent the accumulation of years, and I have often thought

of them with pride during the trout season. It was a real comfort to know that, though the fly-boxes were a miracle of disorder and confusion, the pike tackle was thoroughly well arranged, and ready for use at any moment. The indiarubber fish, it is true, has always been some little anxiety. It began by having a cardboard box of its own, but that got disintegrated very soon, since when the fish has had no home, and has been lying about in the tackle-drawer loose, except when it has come out attached to my sleeve, which has only been now and then.

Having arranged everything, I procured (I) a new long cardboard box to hold the few things I should want to take with me—just enough for three days. Into it I put the fish, to get it out of the way. It was very unwilling to leave the tablecloth. Then I opened (A). The first object that met my view was a large spoon, with a tassel made of red and brown wool. At once I remembered. That tassel was the first step in an experiment—the trial of a colour sequence on pike. There were to have been blue tassels, yellow tassels, rainbow tassels, and other ingenious devices eked out with enamel and sealing-wax. The only drawback was that the spoon utterly refused to spin with the wool on its triangle, and so it was put away—into the wrong box. I pulled it out, and, oh, horror! all the other things in the box followed it lovingly. "Things," do I say? The spinning flights, of which I had often fondly thought no longer deserved such consideration as entities, they were just a conglomeration of wire, swivel, gimp, and triangle, made up as nearly into a ball as such material could be. Still, in

the box remained a few pills of paper—the wrappings that aforetime inclosed those flights and kept them distinct. I set my teeth and proceeded to wrestle with the mass. After about ten minutes I succeeded in extricating a single flight of the Thames sort, three triangles and a lip-hook, which I transferred to (I).

Turning back to my work, I suddenly became aware of an impediment: the indiarubber fish had taken the opportunity of getting out of (I), and was now grasping the tablecloth with one triangle and my sleeve with another. I patiently unhooked it and put it back, and as I did so marked the condition of the disentangled flight, which was really quite unfit for service. Its struggles in (A)—there must have been great struggles there—had grievously affected its whippings, varnish being nearly gone, and silk in one place being cut. I pondered a while, looked again at the conglomeration, and finally with great firmness replaced the whole lot, the free flight included, back in its box, covered it with a decent veil of paper, and put on the lid; then, having put the tasselled spoon to keep the fish company in (I), I turned to (B), the box of live-bait tackles. I will not swear that there were—are—no live-bait tackles there, but I could see none; perhaps they were, or are, in the middle of the tangle. What I chiefly noticed were the spike of an Archer spinner, the big round hook which is at the tail of Mr. Pennell's old pattern of spinning flight, a lead which I use for snap-trolling, and triangles—always triangles. I replaced the lid of (B) silently and passed on to (C). Here I found some more leads, a brass oil-bottle, a reel of copper-wire, two swivels, a Dusty Miller, and

a solitary Jardine snap-tackle. I do not understand (C) at all, and I have no explanation to offer; but, taking out the bottle and the fly, I let it pass for pike tackle, and replaced the lid.

(D) really did hold spoons—one of them with a yellow tassel, by the way; and (E) had some also, besides two or three very rusty wire traces and some spinning leads. (F) was a horrid sight—phantoms, devons, wagtails, and the like, all jumbled up and inextricable, with triangles everywhere. The only inspiration the spectacle gave me was a sound one, so far as it went. I took the indiarubber fish out of (I), placed it in (F), and then put the spoon with the brown and red tassel on top of it to keep it down. Then I shut the lid quickly, and tied a piece of string round the box. I am glad to say I have not seen the fish since. Into (G) I did not look; it is so large, and has had so much put into it at one time or another, that its interior would unman anybody in town. In the country one would feel more able for the task. I just put it into a kitbag with the other boxes, so that it should be there if wanted. Then I went straight out to them that sell and purchased a new stock of spinning flights, some live-bait tackles, wire, swivels, leads, and everything which should make me independent of my old stock.

When Caradoc and I next day reached the little country inn, I got all my gear out and placed it on the sitting-room table. He looked at the stack of boxes and then at me. "No man," he said reprovingly, "possesses so much tackle as that." He little knows, for I did not enlighten him. The new acquisitions

were all that was required. I have heard that dustmen object to finding triangles among the household ashes, and I do not know what to do with the débris that will ensue when I have a few weeks to devote to those boxes. I once asked a very famous and resourceful angler what he did about it. "My dear fellow," he said, with an air of great mystery, "I will tell you. I collect it all in a box, and then go for an ocean voyage; three days out from port I drop it overboard." An ocean voyage! I have only one thing to add: After all the trouble I have taken and the sufferings I have borne—I hope not ill—I am now returned to town without having caught a single pike. Caradoc did not catch one either, and I fear he is quite pleased about it, because he prophesied. He takes a gloomy joy out of being right.

XXVI—ON A STORM-SWEPT PIKE POOL

AN esteemed friend and brother angler once told me, with every sign of sorrow in his countenance, that there was another angler whom he loved well, but with whom he could not go fishing any more. And the reason of it was the weather which unrelentingly pursued that other angler about the kingdom. Everlasting snow marked the unfortunate man's footsteps, a mist of perpetual rain obscured his form, unceasing north-east gales beat his face, and frequent thunder rolled over his head. Moreover, my friend had discovered, these ills descended upon the unjust and the just impartially, so that whoso accompanied the victim of misfortune became a victim himself of the like. In time, it was to be feared, Providence might forget to which of the two the evil weather really belonged, and might atone for forgetfulness by zealously bestowing it upon them both, so that there could be no mistake. Therefore my friend was determined to withdraw from that company while there still remained to himself some small possibility of securing the ordinary man's portion of decent fishing days—a sorry pittance, it is true, but better a good deal than the portion he sought to avoid.

To me, with memory and conscience both awake,

this seems a solemn thought, and, pondering over my records, I begin to wonder whether I too may not become an object of suspicion in the eyes of the brotherhood. Nearly every winter, at any rate, whenever I have been fishing I have had wretched weather, and in more than one instance a friend persuaded out by me has suffered for it. The occasion, however, of which I write found me alone. The angler who was to have been my companion prophesied evil from afar, talked about rheumatism, and stayed wisely at home. But I had heard of a big pike, and was reckless; nor did I appreciate my friend's point of view, until the first morning of fishing, when we reached the water-side soon after ten, and C., the keeper, informed me, in a matter-of-fact tone, that he was wet through already. Half an hour later I was able to return the compliment, and half an hour after that we gave it up and fled. It will take me a long time to forget the cold of that north-easter and furious rain and the discomfort of the wet punt on the shelterless pool.

It is a curious piece of water formed in the valley of, and a few hundred yards away from, a famous trout stream by old-time excavation in quest of peat. Shallow, fringed with tall reeds (in summer, I believe, almost overgrown with them), and connected with the river by a drain at each end, it used in days gone by to form a rare stock-pond for keeping the trout stream well supplied with pike. But now strong gratings restrain esox within his own borders, and fario has many enemies the less, while the pike-fisher has an interesting preserve sacred to himself. It is none the less interesting because its shallowness and clearness

make it by no means easy. Long casting, patience, and quiet are essential to success, and even with all these the fish are uncertain, and there are many days on which a single run seems to be all that one can expect. During that soaking hour on the first day one fish came to the boat, a pretty, olive-backed pike of about seven pounds. After that there was a damp two-mile walk to the station, and a short railway journey to headquarters and dry raiment.

The morrow opened with equal ferocity, and I had grave doubts about fishing at all. Zeal, however, triumphed over caution and an incipient cold, and I started at last by a later train. It was the thought of the big one that sustained me. He was a known fish, and had been hooked and lost by an angler a year or more before. Before starting, I requisitioned a large cork and two smaller ones. The green and white pike float and gaudy pilots had the day before seemed altogether too conspicuous in water only about three feet deep and as clear as glass. The corks being old and dirty were a great improvement. It was some time after 11 a.m. when the first cast was made from the bank. The bait had hardly been in the water for three minutes when the big cork disappeared with a pop which was audible even at that distance of thirty yards or more. I struck in haste, and since repent at leisure. The fish immediately came straight in towards the bank so quietly that I thought him only a small one. An exclamation from the keeper first undeceived me, and then I got sight of him for myself, and gasped. It was obviously the big one and no other. Having come tamely in almost to our feet, he turned with a great

swirl and dashed off for the middle, making the reel scream. There was an instant when the line was not so tight as it ought to have been, and then the bait came home alone. It was very sad, but it was my own fault. I struck too soon, and gave a fraction of slack line as well, so he was almost bound to get off.

After this great misfortune the day seemed destined to be a blank, and we whiled away the time by abusing the rain and discussing the monster's probable weight. The keeper, who has gaffed many a big fish in his time, estimated him at twenty-five pounds at the least. I should not be surprised to learn that he was thirty pounds, for he was a great length. I tried spinning by way of a change after lunch, but moved nothing, and lost two traces on some immovable object at the bottom. About half-past three we took to the boat for a last half-hour, in case the big one should be inclined to come again. The rain was coming down in earnest, and I had just about given up all hope when suddenly the cork went under and the reel screamed. There was no doubt about the fish being well hooked this time, and after a few brisk runs the keeper got the gaff smartly into a handsome fish of thirteen pounds. This was consoling, and I was now satisfied with my sport. It is always a joy to retrieve one's blank when it seems hopeless. And there was more to come. I cast out again considerably to the right of where the fish had taken, and almost at once had another run. When the line tightened on him the fish came quietly towards the boat for some yards, and then let go. "Leave it there," said C., as I was about to wind in and inspect the damage. His advice was sound, and almost as he

spoke the float went under again and the fish moved off at a great pace. The strike went home this time, and after a not very spirited fight I got a great fish up to the gaff, and C. had it in the boat in a moment. My spring balance, which is old and rusty and inaccurate, made him eighteen and a half pounds; but on the station weighing-machine the next day he just failed to touch nineteen pounds, so, making allowance for loss of weight, I can fairly call him nineteen pounds. After this I had time for one more cast before hurrying off to catch the train, and with it I got one more fish, a five-pounder, which went in again.

The third day the wind changed to the south-west, and it rained appallingly the whole morning. C. and I sheltered behind an old boat, which we turned over on its side, so as to get some cover, and watched the corks as the live bait worked about in the vicinity of the big fish. But never a run rewarded us before lunch, and the only thing that inspired hope was a gradual brightening of the sky, which ultimately culminated in a cessation of the rain about one o'clock. Then the wind shifted towards the north, and increased steadily all day, so that though we had very little more rain, it grew very cold. One little fish came to the spoon-bait about 3 p.m., and he was the only pike I saw feeding on either day. And about 4 p.m., out of a little clear hole among the reeds, I got a fish of some six pounds with live bait. Both were returned, and that closed the day's and the expedition's sport. As a finish to the season, it gave me no excuse for complaint. Some there are who are, or seem to be, in the confidence of big fish, and who reckon on a

twenty-pounder or so every year. To me something over twelve pounds once in a way seems as good fortune as a reasonable man can desire. If I had caught the big one as well my pride would have been too great, so things were doubtless ordered not amiss, and if any other angler repairs my error he shall have my congratulations.

XXVII—THE SECRET OF THE CANAL

FROM the swinging-bridge down to the lock is a distance of perhaps three-quarters of a mile, and I should be afraid to say how often I have traversed it, rod in hand, on my way to the river below. The canal is part of the bewildering water-system of the Kennet, and it is not in great esteem for its fishing. In places the river itself is the waterway, and there you may expect to find fish in plenty, now and then even to catch them; but where the lie of the land, presence of a mill, or some other reason has hindered navigation, a canal has been cut to take the traffic, and in it fishing is not nearly so hopeful a matter.

This is not for lack of fish. Roach and dace abound in places, chub and perch are to be seen now and then, and everywhere there are numbers of small jack, with probably a sprinkling of big ones. But all these fish are amazingly difficult to catch. The water is nowhere deep except close to some bridge or lock, and it is nearly always clear as crystal. As one walks along the towpath the dace and roach swim just in front in great timorous droves, and it is scarcely possible to get either bait or fly to them without their taking alarm; even if one does succeed so far, they are not

to be deluded into honest feeding. Many is the hour I have spent trying to tempt them—and they are well worth tempting, being fat and heavy—but I have never succeeded in catching more than two or three at a time, and those only of the younger sort.

Still, the canal has never lost its fascination for me. It is a beautiful place, fringed with long grasses and scented water-thyme, shaded here and there with trees, and always full of varied interest. Somewhere along its course one generally sees a kingfisher flash by like an emerald meteor; at the sedge-lined corners the moorhens are constantly busy; impudent little dabchicks suddenly appear, look scornfully at the intruder, and disappear in a ring like that made by a great fish. At every few yards as one walks there is a small boil in the water close to the bank, and if one stops to look one soon sees a baby pike, poised a yard out, and returning one's gaze out of the corner of a watchful eye. Though he dashed off in such a hurry on being disturbed, he is not really alarmed. Even a tiny pike of four or five inches seems to have hereditary pride of race, to know that his family is the most formidable in the fresh waters, and that he has very little to be afraid of, except, perhaps, an encounter with his own grandparents. You can even touch him with the point of your rod if you advance it very slowly and steadily. Till a pike has had untoward experience of keeper's or poacher's wire noose he seems rather to like that sort of attention.

But the chief joy of the canal to me is the clearness of its water. Always, as I walk along on a sunny day, my steps get slower and slower, and my eyes are con-

stantly turned to the fascinating clear spaces between the weeds. Some day I am sure I shall see something enormous in one of them, some pike huge enough to make history. I have been of that mind for years, and have not yet seen even the big fish which the lock-keeper sees as he passes by—a seventeen-pounder he calls it! Other people see it, too, so it must be there. The fact that it can hide itself from me, as it does, in a stretch where, with favouring light, one can see almost every inch of bottom, every spray of weed, makes me hopeful that there may also be a monster which nobody has ever seen.

I have, moreover, had proofs that the canal holds secrets, and is slow to divulge them. I fished it for two or three years before I had an inkling that there were any trout in it. The thought of trout had never even occurred to me. Why should they leave a noble habitation like the Kennet to take up inferior lodgings in an almost streamless piece of water full of pike? Then one August day, when a breeze was ruffling the surface, I went out to spin for perch with a small Devon minnow, and was presently amazed to see a big trout follow the bait right across the canal almost to my feet. He did not take it, but his appearance opened new vistas, and a more careful watch was kept on the likely spots. Eventually the fact was established that there were one or two trout scattered along the length of canal between the two locks, and that they ought to be fished for. Accordingly, I fished for them, and a tedious business it was, flogging away with Alexandras and the like on windy days, with never a rise to cheer one up, and with a constantly

growing doubt whether the fish did not hasten to leave the canal whenever the locks were opened to give entrance or exit to a barge.

At last I practically gave up the idea of catching one, and should have had no story to tell but for a lucky accident. One morning during what was supposed to be the Mayfly season—Arctic weather was making it a thing of naught—I made my way in rain and wind along the canal to the river, in the fond hope of seeing a few Mayflies and a rising trout. As I went I suddenly saw a trout in the canal. It was in a deepish pool clear of weeds right out in the middle, but not very far from the sill of a small overflow weir, which serves to carry surplus water from the canal, when it is very full, under a light towing-bridge to the river on the other side of a meadow. When the canal is full it causes a very slight stream above this weir, and no doubt the fish seen was there to take advantage of it.

I could not get him to look at anything then, but after a blank day by the river and a consolatory cup of tea, I attached a gold-bodied grilse fly to the end of a Mayfly cast, and came back to the canal. Several likely-looking spots, still ruffled by a brisk but diminishing wind, were fished carefully over without sign of a fish, and at last, about 7 p.m., the haunt of the trout was reached. But the whole pool, some thirty yards in length, was covered without result, and it looked as though the fish was sulky or else had moved elsewhither. But whither would he have been likely to go? One part of a canal is much like another, and this was more favourable as a feeding-ground than most. Only one

spot had been left untried, and this was the yard or two of clear water above the sill of the little weir, not more than two feet deep, and overlooked by every passer-by as he crossed the bridge. Still, there was more stream in this spot than anywhere; no one had crossed the bridge for some time, and it was worth trying. Kneeling, I worked the fly across the spot. It had just reached the corner nearest to me when something seized it like a tiger, and dashed off wildly for the deeper water outside. A brisk fight followed, complicated by weeds, rough gusts of wind, and finally by an obstinate knuckle-joint of the landing-net; but at last all went smoothly, and in due course I knelt upon the towpath gloating over a beautifully spotted, small-headed trout that looked as if it ought to weigh three and a half pounds.

After this triumph I made my way along the canal at peace with all the world, fishing such spots as seemed possible, but not expecting—or, indeed, desiring—another fish. It was enough glory to have achieved so unlikely a feat as killing a trout in the canal. At last I reached the river, found that there was scarcely a Mayfly to be seen and scarcely a fish moving, waited about for an hour on the chance of a rise, and finally turned for home in the dusk. What instinct induced a pause at the little weir on the way back it would be difficult to say. The theory that a vacant place is at once occupied by another trout was scarcely to be applied to the canal, where fish were so few and far between. Still, the situation was a good one, the thing was just worth trying, and, to be brief, there was another trout there, which came head and tail at the fly, hooked itself and

made the reel scream as it dashed off. Such a fight seldom falls to an angler's lot. The fish for some minutes had it all its own way, and it was too dark by now to see where the weeds and other dangers were. The power of its runs was extraordinary, and yet when it jumped, as it did from time to time, it did not seem to be the six or seven pounds that it pulled. Only at the last, when after something like ten minutes the net received its own, was the mystery explained. The trout had hooked itself in one of the ventral fins. It was not so big as the first, after all, but it was even more shapely and well fed. The brace, on reaching the scales, were found to be three pounds six ounces and two pounds ten ounces respectively, and the hours of patience and effort which I had expended on the trout of the canal were at length repaid.

There were no more trout from there that year, but the next came tidings of two very big ones seen by a keeper and others. I patrolled the bank often early in the season, but I could not find them or any trace of them. Then came the Mayfly time, and the usual disappointment with it. Despite glorious summer weather we had hardly any fly, and there were only about three days on which it was the least use fishing with the Mayfly—small flies on the lower Kennet are hardly worth considering. Still, we were all supposed to be celebrating the great festival, so one went out dutifully day by day, hoping against hope for a hatch of fly and rise of trout which never came.

One afternoon, after a hot and fruitless morning, I had had lunch, and was strolling along by the canal

soon after two, thinking principally of the futility of fishing, when I became aware of a movement in the water about twenty yards below me, close to the bank. I stopped, and perceived that it was a fish travelling in my direction and rising as it travelled. Presently I got a glimpse of a great length of spotted trout, enough almost to warrant the vast estimate of the keeper, which had been upwards of seven pounds. At the same moment there were footsteps behind me, and five small children trotted along waving boughs and making merry. I threw myself on their mercy, and implored them, as they valued all our lives, to creep along by the fish as close to the hedge and as far from the water as they could. Good as gold, they went by like mice, and left me with the trout still rising, and the chance, it seemed, of a lifetime. I was too excited to change my cast or take off the drawn point, for at any moment the fish might leave off. The Wickham would do as well as anything, and needed no changing. Rapidly I extended line, and was about to cast, when, horror! more footsteps sounded behind. I fear a lover and his lass have seldom before aroused tendencies so nearly homicidal. He was waving as he went a peeled wand, which flashed in the sun—waving it over the water! I groaned in spirit, but said nothing. There was nothing to say.

They went by, and I saw the wave of the fish as it retreated before them to the other side. It was put down for good. But no, up it came under the bank, once, twice, and a third time, travelling a foot at each rise. With a hedge at my side and a tree behind, covering it was an impossibility, but I was so excited

that I performed that impossibility. With a miraculous switch cast, of which in cold blood I should be incapable (I heard the fly catch in the tree, but pulled it away madly), I got the fly out across the canal; it fell just in front of the trout, and a moment later had been sucked in. Then came the thrilling sensation of getting the hook home well into something really solid, a first sullen plunge, and afterwards a long fight up and down the canal. Twice he weeded me, several times the frail gut was in jeopardy; but mercifully he did nothing very violent, and at last I pulled him, beaten, over the big landing-net, and lifted him triumphantly to shore, the biggest trout I have ever got on a dry fly, and twenty-three and a half inches long. I wish I could stop there. But the truth must be told. Instead of his being the six-pounder I made sure he was during the fight, the diabolically truthful scales showed him to be four and a half pounds, and no more. A big head and good shoulders tapered away sadly towards the tail, and showed him to be both ancient and cannibal. "An ugly brute," said a friend afterwards. So he was, but he gave me about the most exciting half-hour of my fishing life—a half-hour which I shall remember while I have life at all.

XXVIII—THE NORFOLK BROADS

"MUD, trippers, notice-boards, and east wind," was the concise, but sufficient, comment of a friend on the suggestion that a holiday might be spent not unpleasantly in a certain corner of the Broad district, and he added in decided tones that he had already been there. The unpleasant features enumerated may nowadays be laid to the charge of the land of marshes with some truth; and even other things, such as gnats, might be added to the list without stretching too fine a point. But when these words have been spoken, all has not been said. There still remain the charm of wind-swept wastes and the mystery of great waters for the poet, and for the angler (the same person in another mood, of course) there still remain vast quantities of fish.

Moreover, if the poet-angler be fortunate, he can find him some nook remote from all noise of trippers, disfigured by no inhospitable notice-boards, and sheltered from the east wind; here the mud is decently clothed with some five feet of water, a good depth as the Broads go, and even the gnats seem less ferocious than in more populous parts. To get to this happy spot he must take ship on one of the biggest of the

broads, turn to the right when he pushes off from the landing-stage, and then row as far as he can. Having rowed as far as he can, he must go on farther, an impossibility that will be rendered possible by the discovery of a narrow channel not immediately obvious. Through this he will come upon a great round pool that almost deserves a name to itself; in its corner is the nook, a creek leading up to an old disused boat-house, and shaded with such trees as are not often found in this part of Norfolk. The creek is, as has been said, about five feet deep, with a width of some thirty yards between the reeds and bulrushes that grow thick on either side. A narrow cutting on the left gives direct passage to the boat-house, and it is off the corner of this that it will be best to fish.

The boat is moored to a pole at head and stern about ten yards out, and then the ground-bait is thrown in close to the reeds. It consists of bread and bran soaked and loosely kneaded; in still water it does not do to have it too stiff, as it will not scatter sufficiently. A handful or so of stewed wheat is also cast after the bread and bran, and, in addition, a few crusts of dry bread are dropped overboard. What wind there is comes, of course, from the east—that is to say, from behind the angler—and it will blow the crusts to the edge of the reeds, where they will remain to entice the rudd. Local fishermen would consider it useless to fish for rudd so close to the boat; they are accustomed to casting thirty and even forty yards, but that is on the broads more particularly noted for this fish. Those waters have paid the penalty of fame, and have been much over-fished, with the consequence that their

rudd have become educated. Here, though rudd are plentiful enough, they are not much sought, and are not so shy. But at best rudd are more or less of an accident, unless one fishes for them specially; they move about a good deal, and to do much with them one must follow the shoal. Roach and bream are what the angler expects here principally. The bottom is too muddy for perch, but there is always a chance of big tench—though it is a slender chance; the tench of the Broads are seldom taken on rod and line.

Two rods are set up and ready for the fray. Both are light bamboos of fourteen feet, one carrying a running line of the finest silk and gossamer cast and hook-link for roach, the other being fitted with somewhat stronger tackle for bream. The bream-line is swung out first, baited with a good-sized lobworm. It may be some considerable time before the bream find the ground-bait, so the rod will probably not need much attention. The other hook is next baited with a plump grain of stewed wheat, and then cast out towards the reeds somewhat to the right, where one of the pieces of dry crust is already being attacked by little rudd or roach. The roach-rod is held in the angler's right hand, while the other rests on the thwart of the boat on his left, with the end of the butt under an oar. Almost immediately there is a bite at the wheat, and the red top of the porcupine quill disappears. Fortunately, these roach of the Broads are not as the roach of the Lea, or it would be impossible to strike them from such a distance. Here they bite boldly, and take their time about it. The fish is, however, but a little thing, and is promptly returned on

the other side of the boat. The hook is rebaited and cast out again, to return almost at once with a second tiny roach on it.

Several others follow and are duly returned, and the angler is pondering on the advisability of trying white paste in the hope of something bigger, when his other float forces itself on his attention by not being there. Laying down the roach-rod across the boat, he picks up the other and strikes, to find that he is fast in a good fish, which by its play is evidently no bream. It shows plenty of dash, and tries more than once to get among the reeds, but a little extra strain turns it each time, and at last it is brought towards the boat, contesting every inch of the way. The gleam of a golden side reveals a rudd as it makes a final dash to avoid the net, and presently it can be admired in all its glory, as it is lifted into the boat. There is no more beautiful fish than a Norfolk rudd, with its brilliant fins and bronze-gold sides. Somewhat deeper than a roach, it is not so deep as a bream, and is more active and powerful than either. The fish just caught is one and a half pounds, which may be considered a good weight, though three and even three and a half pounders are not unknown.

A fresh lobworm is thrown out, but for a long time no notice is taken of it, though the other rod, which is now baited with paste, continues to catch small roach and rudd, and now and then a little silver bream, though of these, fortunately, not many, and presently gets one of the first weighing three quarters of a pound. All things considered, this is a large roach for a broad where, as a rule, the species runs small; this corner,

however, has a reputation among the one or two people who know it for holding big roach. The angler was assured that fish of two pounds had been taken here; but none of these monsters are in evidence to-day. Another roach of the same weight is taken, two rudd of one pound each follow to successive casts, and then the other float once more shows signs of life. It stirs slightly, and then moves slowly off. There is no mistake about the fish this time; the slow and solemn circles betray the bream, which, for all its two and a half pounds, is landed in less time than was the rudd. The second rod may now be laid aside, for the bream have plainly now discovered that a good meal is to be had for the eating, and little bubbles on the top of the water show that they are making the most of it. As usually happens when the bream of the Broads begin to feed, a second bite follows at once, and a fish of two pounds is landed. Then comes an hour of brisk sport, at the end of which the angler finds that he has taken twenty of the slimy creatures, weighing from one and a half pounds to three and a half pounds, and with this total he feels that honour is more than satisfied. Besides, he is more than perplexed to know what to do with them. Bream are a doubtful kind of present, even in Norfolk, where they know how to cook them. He would have been better pleased to have caught fewer and bigger ones, but it is very seldom that a four-pounder is taken in the Broads themselves. The fish, curiously enough, seem to stop growing at about three and a half pounds; anything over that is a rarity. In the deeper portions of the tidal rivers, however, heavy bream are not uncommon.

But the angler has no reason to be dissatisfied. If he has caught nothing worth talking about in Norfolk, he has had sport which in many less-favoured districts would be considered marvellous, and he has proved that even in the Broadland of to-day it is possible to angle happily for hours without seeing a notice-board, much less a tripper. But it is not safe to boast; a musically evil sound catches his ear, and warns him that the gnats are awaking from sleep as the sun sets, and that he will be wise to pull up his poles and flee, and the pulling up of the poles recalls the mud to his notice. As he sculls gently down the creek a great wave seems to shoot away from the boat, as though a torpedo were making for the right-hand shore. The wave goes steadily on till it reaches the reeds, when there is a heavy plunge, and then silence. That was one of Norfolk's biggest pike. There are several round about the creek that are veritable monsters.

Such is a typical day of good fortune on the Broads, a day in which one is seldom idle for lack of bites. There are also typical days of bad fortune, about which I know, I think, everything that can be known. One cannot angle steadily in a district for six weeks, as I did a few years ago, without having some trying times. Equally, however, one can scarcely avoid some measure of good luck.

One of the most interesting experiences was connected with perch, fish for which I have ever had a lively esteem. I had been quite unable to catch any of respectable size, owing, I was told, to their being scarce. The bad old local custom of fishing for them in what ought to be the close season, and thinning

them out when heavy in spawn, had apparently played havoc with them—at any rate, in such waters as I could get at. Then one day I found the drain behind the windmill. It was but a small place, a yard or two wide and about three feet deep, and not more than about fifty yards were fishable, but it appeared to have escaped the angler's attention, and was full of fish. From it in one way and another, with worm, artificial minnow, or small rudd I got quite a dozen handsome perch in a couple of days, besides some roach and rudd, and a couple of jack of about four pounds each. Afterwards I found and explored other drains, not, it is true, with such good results, but seldom without something to show for the venture.

Another odd bit of luck came to me when I had about had enough of trying to catch rudd on Heigham Sound. I attributed my lack of success to the misplaced generosity of anglers in general. The system of baiting for rudd is, as I have said, to throw bread into the water, so anglers threw bread. I threw bread myself. We threw it in unbelievable quantities. We —no, I had better speak for myself—I increased the quantity of bread as the number of bites grew less. The result was that one could, in a manner of speaking, hardly see the water for the loaves. Therefore several days of determined angling, sacrificing of bread, and chasing of fugitive shoals had produced no success worth mentioning. The fish were simply overfed, and they would hardly look at a hook bait. It was very vexatious, because the rudd is one of Norfolk's choicest products.

At this moment of despair there came to me a

welcome permission to fish a small private broad not very far away. Here rudd were said to be equally abundant, and far less educated by overfeeding. A voyage of exploration was therefore undertaken. A fly-rod was put into the boat. The attack was not to be made that day in full force with loaves, heavy floats, and the rest of the panoply of war, but if a fish or two could be persuaded to take the fly, exploration would acquire an added interest. By the time the broad was reached the morning had turned out very hot, and there was no wind. The boat was sculled gently round about twenty-five yards away from the reeds which fringed the sides, in the hope that a shoal of fish might give signs of its presence. But not a dimple broke the surface, and it looked as if the sheet of water were absolutely devoid of fish. It was so shallow that even a moderate-sized rudd must have left a wake when fleeing before the boat. Indeed, like many of the Norfolk waters, it seemed to be gradually filling up; in most places there was barely depth enough to float the dinghy.

I had begun to think very poorly of private broads, when an apparent opening in the reeds caught my eye. It looked as if it ought to lead somewhere, and, standing in the bow, I paddled the boat gently up to it. Sure enough, it was a channel, and it gave access to a biggish reed-lined pool of greater depth than the broad outside, and in it a great shoal of bream were visible, hurrying away before the approaching boat. This was where the fish were, then; if the bream were in this secluded spot, the rudd would probably be in the neighbourhood, too. However, there was no sign of them,

and a small Francis chub fly thrown close to the reeds at several likely spots produced no response. Presently a kind of gap in the reeds opposite attracted attention. It was not an opening, but rather a depression, as though the reeds had been pressed down across an opening, making a barrier about three feet high. The boat was paddled up to it, and then it became obvious that there had been an opening, which had been choked up, possibly by accident, possibly by design. On the other side of the low reed wall was another pool, a small round place about thirty yards across, with a little reed island in the middle.

And here at last were the rudd, swimming lazily about in the sunshine close to the island, and looking like reddish-brown shadows. A better point of vantage for the angler could not have been designed. From behind the reeds I could cast a fly into the middle of the shoal and run no risk of detection if I kept fairly still, and I could also watch its effect. The fly fell within a foot of the island at the first cast, and was drawn gently away from it. Immediately three fish turned and followed it in a leisurely manner. Presently the line tightened, there was a gentle strike, and a gleam of deep gold showed that rudd No. 1 was hooked. He was played rather gently at first, so that he might not splash about on the surface and alarm his fellows, but as he was gradually enticed away from the island more pressure was applied, and before long the net was dipped into the water on the other side of the barrier, and his capture was assured. The fish was a really gorgeous spectacle in the bright sunshine, his scales glowing with a deep red-gold, and his fins as red as

blood. He had fought, too, up to every ounce of the pound he weighed. He was tapped on the head and consigned with all honour to the creel.

Then the shoal was attacked again, and a second fish of similar size was hooked and netted in the same manner. Then came a beauty of one and three-quarter pounds, which proved to be the largest of the day. He was followed by a brace weighing one and a quarter pounds and one and a half pounds respectively, and then the shoal disappeared. There was no fuss, and apparently no panic; it simply vanished, probably into the reeds. However, it had paid its toll of victims, and, what was more important, it had shown where rudd must be looked for by a fly-fisher. The rest of the day was devoted to seeking similar little pools cut off from the world, and to fishing them when found. One has no idea how numerous they are until one has searched for them systematically. At least a dozen were discovered before sundown, and most of them yielded a rudd or two, though none was so remunerative as the first. But by the time of departure some two dozen fish were in the creel, and as they weighed nearly as many pounds, the day's fishing was highly satisfactory.

It was on the same broad and in a similar manner that a companion and I had an exciting evening with bream. The wind had been blowing all day—that terrible east wind which reduces the angler to despair, churning the waste of waters into turbulent heaps, tearing the boat from its moorings time after time, and causing anathema to be hurled on an unoffending and unpretentious coast-line which offers no headland to

protect the low-lying country behind. Many different corners under lee of the rushes which seemed to be relatively calm had proved delusive on being tried. The two long poles used as rypecks had met with misfortune early in the morning, having been pushed too far down into the bottomless mud. Both refused to come out again, and one snapped through too vigorous persuasion, while the other remained as a warning to mariners. After this loss the boat had to be moored by the primitive fashion of tying string to rushes. Sometimes it was the string that broke, sometimes the rushes. The result was always the same—a clumsy boat careering madly over the baited pitch, and two irate anglers abusing each other for what was the fault of neither. There was another trouble, too, which followed on the first as night follows on day—the mud-banks. We spent solid hours in wrestling with them, because we were, of course, blown on to them whenever the moorings gave way.

The wonder was that anything had been caught at all, but the boat did contain one fish, a golden-scaled rudd of about one and a half pounds, which had been snatched hurriedly from a corner with the aid of a lob-worm during a brief lull of the gale. There had been another bite also, but at the same moment the wind rose again, and seemed to tear the hook out of the fish's mouth as it flung itself on the boat. As for bream, there had not been a sign of them, and, indeed, this was scarcely a matter for surprise. One has to wait for bream to begin to feed, often quite a long time, and for the angler to wait his boat must wait too.

At last, about four o'clock, we came to the con-

clusion that we must either give it up or find some such channel as I had found before, with sheltered water at the end of it. After a good deal of searching we found one, and pushed the boat into it. The narrow waterway pursued a sinuous course for some fifty yards, and then came a surprise—at the end of it was a big pool of water, almost worthy to be called a broad itself, except that it was not broad, but narrow, its size being due to its great length. Also it was scarcely rippled by the wind. Furthermore, it was deeper than the water outside—five feet at least; and lastly, as the boat glided in big greenish shapes moved away from it—bream at last. This was better, and hope arose again. The method of mooring was satisfactory enough here, and a liberal supply of groundbait was thrown in some fifteen yards away, after which lobworms—one on a light leger and the other on float tackle, with a big, upstanding quill to mark events—were offered to the consideration of the shoal which would surely assemble before nightfall. Probably no one had fished in that rush-girt pool for years before, if ever, for the bream were truly unsophisticated. Before a quarter of an hour was passed bubbles appeared on the surface—sure sign that the fish had gathered for the feast—and five minutes later the quill float moved steadily off, going under water at a slanting angle. There was none of that uprising and lying flat which is commonly the token of small fish; the bite was clearly the work of a good one that meant business.

Many men say that the bream is a poor fighter, but that is probably because they have also in mind the

tackle generally used for his destruction, tackle that might cope satisfactorily with salmon. Hooked on roach tackle at a considerable distance, as is usually necessary where the water is shallow, the bronze fish is no mean opponent, and is quite likely to get the best of it. In this case the first fish ran out line steadily at a good round pace for nearly twenty yards, and then began the heavy boring which is such a test for drawn gut if it is at all frayed. Before the issue was decided one way or the other the top of the leger-rod began to bend, and a second contest was in progress. Both fish were a long way from the boat, and there was a risk that the lines might cross, in which case disaster was certain. However, the leger tackle was stouter than the other, and the second fish was played without yielding an inch of line, brought firmly in, and netted as quickly as possible—a good bream of three pounds. Then the other began to weaken, and gradually yielded to the steady strain, eventually being netted after a fight that had lasted several minutes, a fish of three and three-quarter pounds, which is a large one for the district. This was a good beginning, and it was followed up by a remarkable run of sport. Fish after fish entered the net, first from one rod, then from the other; often both had one on at the same time. And all were of good size, ranging from two and a half pounds to nearly four pounds. In point of number the leger-rod came out ahead with a total of nineteen, but the float tackle caught all the biggest fish; its eleven victims averaged over three pounds each. About a quarter-past seven there was a catastrophe: the hook-link, frayed with its hard work, parted, and a fish

escaped. The other bait was seized almost immediately, and the bream was landed, but after that there was not another bite. Clearly the shoal had taken alarm, and the fun was over. But as a finish to a disappointing day it had been remarkable, and we made our way back across the broad, now calm as a millpond, to the staithe well content.

XXIX—THE ANGLER AND THE BRIDGE

PRESUMABLY every angler now and then sits down and meditates on the pleasures that have been his in the past, and, if the fates are kind, are to be his in the future; such meditation is just as much a part of the pastime as is the act of buying a new rod or tying a fly, though, indeed, it may be a result of either action, and often is. In this meditation the angler begins by constructing a mental image of some sheet of water by which his steps have led him aforetime. There it is in its perfection—sparkling ripple and still pool; trailing weed or jagged rock; thundering weir or sluggish backwater; a river, perhaps of the north, perhaps of the south, but always perfect after its kind, and always full of great fish. Rivers vary, of course, as do anglers, but they have at least one feature in common—their abiding charm for those who know them; in this, too, it is legitimate to hope, anglers and other "very honest men" are not without resemblance to them.

There is one other feature which is surely common to all mental pictures of all but the most primitive rivulets—the bridge. Can any angler lay his hand on his heart and say that his mental river is bridgeless?

Or, if he will be so bold, can he affirm that there is not so much as a flood-gate or a plank across a carrier? Will he deny that even yet his heart swells with pride when he thinks of the two-pound trout that used to feed a foot below that plank, and now (for a reason he knows very well) feeds there no more? Will he perjure himself by denying further that on his next visit he proposes to fetch a very considerable and rather damp compass out into the meadow so that he may crouch behind the rushes twenty yards below the plank, there to ascertain if that trout has a successor, and if that successor rises?

As a matter of fact, the angler cannot deny these things, or their parallels, for the bridge plays too intimate and happy a part in all his imaginings. It is almost as necessary to him as the river. On it he fits together his tackle at morn, and estimates the chances of the day's sport; on it again he counts his spoils at eve, or considers theories to account for lack of spoils —theories which shall have some weight in argument with vain and scoffing persons. And under it between whiles, either from below or above, he plies his angle and tries to catch a trout—usually, honesty must admit, without success. Truly the bridge plays a great and important rôle in the angler's scheme of things, and it deserves greater honour than is usually paid to it. A new John Dennys, should one arise out of the poetic silence which is gradually enwrapping the sport, might sing the bridge in many cantos without overstepping the bounds of seemliness.

The bridge is a thing of infinite variety. Every structure which spans a piece of water has a character

of its own, whether it be a mighty fabric of many arches bearing a king's name and a venerable date, or a humble log fitted with two uprights and a rough hand-rail. There is, for example, the ancient stone bridge of two big arches, below which is the Bridge Pool. Its character suffers somewhat from the fact that no man can catch a salmon out of that pool, though they lie there abundantly and leap like wanton kids. The stream sets principally under the right-hand arch, and, running askew into the pool, is lost in an immense sluggish eddy. The fish lie in the curl of the eddy, and to reach them you must cast straight across the stream, which bags the line at once. No doubt that is why the salmon are not caught. If you try to cast down and across stream from the rough stones just below the bridge, you switch out line by degrees, at last make a colossal effort, and knock the point of your Durham Ranger off against the stonework behind. He who has experienced it may be believed.

In contrast to this ancient piece is the dark, squat railway-bridge on its massive iron pillars which bestrides the deep, slow-flowing river of the Fens. Here a man may moor his boat, fastening the painter to the camp-sheathing, in certainty that this is the exact spot where the three-pound perch ought to be, lying among the weeds that grow in the slack behind each pier, and darting out on the small fry that venture too close to them. Whether the three-pounders really are there the angler never discovers, and the thunder of an express train just over his head is disconcerting; but the bridge has its charms for all that. Some counties away there is another such bridge, where there are

undoubtedly three-pound perch. Just below it, too, is a small patch of gravel close to the bank, on which in Mayfly time may sometimes be seen an enormous trout—a ten-pounder probably. And under the far side, where one cannot fish, lives some monster which moves about at dusk like a submarine boat. Possibly it is a pike, but its identity is less clear than its importance in helping to make the bridge a place of mysterious fascination.

These are all rather big bridges, but there are bigger still, as the great one across Tweed, from whose top you may in clear water see the shoal of salmon lying in the stream below. If you are lucky you may see one of them come up and seize the Wilkinson, which the angler, standing at the base of the pier on the English side, has just offered to it; if you are very lucky you may be that angler yourself, and then you will always think kindly of the bridge. But in casting beware of the bents behind; they are malicious and they are tough, as a permanent kink in a favourite old greenheart can testify. Another great bridge spans Severn, within sight of Malvern's hills, where also are salmon, but not a kindly race for the angler, whose lures they utterly despise. The diversion here was, on hot days, to dap for chub with a bluebottle. The angler was so far above them that they paid no attention to him, and cheerfully gulped in the fly. Often the strike failed of its effect, for the distance deceived the eye; often the fish, hooked and played to exhaustion, dangled awhile in the air, and fell back with a splash. It needs stout tackle and some management to pull a lusty chub up on to a high bridge.

These memories have pleasure in them, but perhaps it is the little bridges which appeal to one most, and especially little bridges over little trout-streams. Some of them have witnessed great triumph, as that wooden bridge which sheltered a bright two-pounder, fat as butter even in April, and willing to take a fly on the very coldest day of that icy month. Others have presided over unspeakable misfortunes, as that two-span brick bridge which in May provided a mad rise of trout, and then broke the point of the hook, so that the angler rose fish after fish, yet caught nothing. There are bridges which tantalize the very soul. One carries a road over a stream so small that you would hardly expect a trout over a pound in it. Yet lean over its parapet awhile. Below you is a little pool of slack water on the edge of the trickle which represents the current. It is some ten inches deep, and is tenanted by a big shoal of minnows. Presently a wave disturbs it, the minnows rush hither and thither, and just under the bridge is heard a tremendous splash. You cannot possibly cast a fly under the bridge, and if you float a worm down (there are anglers who do so) you are morally certain to lose your tackle in the piles which have been ingeniously disposed here and there. Still, the audacious succeed sometimes, and one morning a man got four trout here weighing sixteen pounds.

Even smaller is the stream spanned by the next bridge, a tiny burn trickling down from the moors. There are no four-pounders here, but there are memories quite as precious. The stream falls over a step at the top of the bridge into a miniature pot just below it, and then cascades into a little pool. Out of

the pool came a trout of five ounces, no less; out of the pot one of four ounces, and then the fly, drifted down from above the bridge, was seized by another quarter-pounder just below the step. It was a great fishing, and the little bridge is an ever-welcome vision. Welcomed also, though with a tinge of melancholy, is the image of "the brick bridge"—such was its honoured though not distinguished name. More than one good trout has succumbed to a red spinner or red quill placed, not without difficulty, where the stream rippled slightly over the old beam. More than one jack has seized minnow or dace in the deep pool below and paid the penalty. And once there was noble sport with roach, drifting pellets of paste down from above with a fly-rod, the finest gut, and a fly-hook stripped of its feathers. But, alas! one day the old bridge collapsed utterly, and the new wooden one seems an interloper. Even the fish despise it, and have gone away. It is melancholy to think that sad mortality will undo all our old bridges at the last. But many of them will last our time, and maybe a bit longer, so we need not repine.

XXX—BLAGDON

LIFE is largely composed of regrets, some bigger, some smaller. One of my very biggest is that on a certain May morning in the year 1905 I was not at Blagdon, whither I had been bidden by one of the great anglers of our time. As things were, I was gazing dolefully upon the Wye in flood—ten feet of flood there were, I remember—and wondering how Lorenzo was faring the while. And how was he faring? Five brace of trout weighing some fifty pounds—that was approximately his modest basket. Other things being equal, I would, I think, sooner fish for salmon than trout, but when the trout are *such* trout, when the salmon-river is in big and increasing flood, when one reflects that never in the history of English fishing had there been such an opportunity as Blagdon offered that May, and when—— But one cannot go into the whole appalling business and still keep calm. I might have caught an eight-pounder! Lorenzo did, then or soon afterwards. I might——

It was not till the opening day of the following season that I made first acquaintance with the wonderful Somersetshire lake which has inspired so many angling rhapsodies, and then I was a year too

late. By that I mean a year too late for great baskets of monsters running from four pounds to eight or nine pounds. It will, I trust, never be too late for a fisherman to know and love Blagdon. It is still, and always will be, a delightful place, and though its fishing has altered in character, I am not sure that it is not even more interesting now than it was of old. I cannot speak, of course, with the experience of Lorenzo and those others who reaped such a harvest in 1905, but I did just get a glimpse of the golden age on that opening day of 1906. I learnt what it was like to have a real big Blagdon trout bending the rod and filling the soul with terror; I saw the end of the old order. And since then I have watched it giving place to the new, and though for that great lost opportunity there must always be regret, I am not sure that I did not enjoy my last visit to Blagdon more than the first.

The lake, as most people know, is one of the reservoirs which supply the needs of the great city of Bristol;* but though the work of men's hands, it has as much beauty as any place of Nature's making. At one end there is a great stone dam, and there is some suggestion of prose about the buildings behind it, but turn your back on them and you have nothing but poetry. On the right lies Blagdon village, scattered delightfully over twin spurs of Blackdown, a fortunate village, which seems to have grown naturally in the most becoming manner, not too crowded nor yet too

* Information as to tickets, etc. (the charge for each rod is 10s. per day for bank fishing, 20s. if one fishes from a boat, which has to be booked some time beforehand as a rule), can be obtained from Mr. Alfred J. Alexander, Bristol Waterworks Company, Bristol.

widespread, a village whose very existence is an answer to those who cavil at the English nation for not being blessed with artistic sense. I have known rises from four-pounders missed because the angler was so busy admiring Blagdon village, with its grey church tower and wealth of fruit blossom, and one cannot praise it more highly than by that confession. On the left lie richly wooded slopes with a picturesque farm or two nestling among the trees. In front is the lake almost as far as one can see, perhaps three-quarters of a mile wide at the Blagdon end, and gradually narrowing till one comes to the mouth of the River Yeo, which runs in past Ubley Mill, grey stone among the trees, where are the stock-ponds and hatchery. All round the lake are hills, Blackdown, the highest point of the Mendips, being one of them. Its thousand odd feet show very impressively when thunder threatens, and afford a superb spectacle when the lightning plays upon their summit. To agitated human beings at that time the ascent to the village and shelter is formidable. I shall never forget the race that Lorenzo and I raced one Sunday afternoon, or the breathlessness of our entry just before the deluge.

The lake itself is more than commonly attractive, apart from its surroundings. It is no mere ordinary sheet of water with a deep portion in the middle, shallow portions at the sides, and the other features of "expectedness," if I may so term it. A chart showing all the variations and inequalities in its depth and bottom would be an interesting but complicated thing. Winding tortuously through the middle of the lake is the old river-bed of the Yeo, and criss-crossed every-

where are ditches, dykes, a submerged lane or so, with occasional little pools and pot-holes marking the spots once occupied by duck-ponds or depressions in the fields. One result of this is that anywhere one is likely to come upon an unexpected bit of deep water subtly disposed even in a shallow corner, and, of course, in such a place one expects to find a big trout lurking secure, but willing, if one can but put a fly before him. Another result is that the bank angler is tempted to take plenty of exercise, for beyond every bend he hopes for some of that variety which is so calculated to lure him on. There is something particularly tempting about the Blagdon ditches, dark blue or olive ribbons stretching out across the yellow or brown of the shallows.

On my first visit the lake was quite full, and its circumference was a mighty thing—some seven miles, I should say, taking all the bays and corners into consideration. Part of the distance is heavy and moist going (knee-boots or wading-stockings are a wise precaution), and the man who desires to fish all round it in the day needs good legs and the "merry heart." A few energetic souls make the round without apparently regarding it as a matter for pride. One or two, whose hearts can hardly be able to contain their merriness if Shakespeare is right, do it before breakfast, and turn up smiling about 5 p.m., having done it again. But the ordinary out-of-condition mortal will find one circuit in the course of the day as much as prudence dictates, while the cautious one will only attempt to cover so much ground as can be done without undue fatigue and with due regard to return. This last point

is worth bearing in mind, for when one is half-way round, the distance covered is no wise less in returning the way one came than in completing the circle. I was all for a cautious procedure, but consuming curiosity as to what lay beyond every next promontory led me on and on until the thing was done, and backward steps were become, if not impossible, at least ineffectual.

The flies commonly used for Blagdon trout are smallish salmon flies—Silver Doctor, Jock Scott, Silver Grey, and the like. March brown and Alexandra take their toll of the fish, and there is a fly with a gold body which has been dubbed the "Field" by Donald Carr, the head-ranger. I introduced it at my first visit, and it killed well for a couple of seasons, but I fancy it has pretty well exhausted its magic by now. It is little more than a Wickham with a red tail and one or two extra adornments. Salmon-flies require something powerful in the way of a rod, and I started with a fourteen-foot split cane, which I did not find a bit too big for bank-fishing. Even for boat work I believe a double-handed rod would have advantages, as the trout often rise within a yard or two of the boat, and a single-handed rod sometimes fails to drive the big hook home. But conditions now are not quite what they were, as I hope to show later.

On the first day I fished Blagdon conditions were unfavourable, the wind being cold and the fish sulky. There had, it subsequently appeared, been misfortunes among the sticklebacks. Either they had all been eaten or had died some other way; at any rate, there were none visible, and so the big trout were not close in shore chasing them, or lying in wait as they ought to

have been. The stock of sticklebacks has since been renewed, with great advantage to the bank-fisher, but that day I flogged sturdily on for a mile or more, and saw nothing except the spectacle of a friend's rod bending in the distance—bending to no purpose, because the fish got off after a bit of a fight.

For another hour there was no further sign of Blagdon fish, but I persevered along the north shore, casting across a strong north-westerly wind. I then decided on a change of fly, discarded the dropper, a Silver Doctor, and replaced the March brown at point with one of the "Field" flies already mentioned. This soon aroused the curiosity of a fish, but he merely followed it and did not take. My first real rise was got in a bay where a deep channel about four feet wide ran out into the lake, showing dark amid the shallower water. Fishing across the bay, dropping the fly just on the far side of this channel and working it towards me, I got five rises in about as many yards of water and in quick succession. But though three of them seemed to mean business, nothing came of it. One fish ran a few yards and was off, another jumped and was off, and the third was off after holding the fly for a second. All three seemed fish of four pounds or thereabouts.

The series of misfortunes was disappointing, but I consoled myself by thinking that the trout had evidently now begun to feed, and that it would only be a matter of minutes before the first fish was in the bag. But never a rise did I get during the next hour and a half, nor did I see another fish move, and by the time I joined my friend a mile farther on for lunch, I was of

the opinion that the Blagdon trout were lunching light that day. My friend, I found, had not stirred a fish since his loss, and two other anglers who passed by had not killed anything either. Altogether, the prospects looked bad. After lunch my friend decided to retrace his steps, and I went on to explore, as we were fully half-way round. The edge of the lake in this part was rather shallow, but here and there were narrow channels of the kind described, which certainly looked as if they should yield something. It was not, however, till I came to the point where the lake gets a good deal narrower that I saw a sign of another fish. Here there was a regular dyke running out from the shore; it looked as if it might originally have been a road. To fish it one had to cast right into the wind, and the fly fell with more force than precision. At the mouth, however, and in about five feet of water, a fish came at my gold-bodied fly like a tiger and went off well hooked. From its play I thought at first that it must be a big rainbow. It came out of the water several times and fought desperately for the open lake. The gut, however, was suited to the rod and fly, and the fish never got out more than ten yards of line at a burst, eventually coming into the big net dead-beat. On the shore it proved to be a brown trout, bright in colour, though rather long in proportion to its girth. The spring balance made it about four and a half pounds. I was now well satisfied, having got a Blagdon trout in spite of sticklebacks and other disadvantages, and having saved what looked like being a blank.

From the scene of triumph to the end of the lake the water within reach of the rod seemed shallow, and the

wind made casting difficult, so I made my way on to the corner where the channel of the River Yeo runs in. There is a short stretch of the river itself between the road and the lake which can be fished. It is only about twenty feet broad in most places, but it is deep, and sometimes yields a good fish. Standing well back from the bank, I began to cast about half-way down with a short line. The fly had not travelled a yard before there was a great boil, and I was into something that raced away upstream like a salmon. It kept deep, and I got no sight of it for some time, until it turned and came back at the same pace for its starting-point, and then jumped. After that it tried to bore right under my own bank, but the long rod was fortunately able to check that proceeding, and the rest of the fight was carried on in the depths. It must have been nearly ten minutes before I finally got the trout into the net and carried it, exulting, back into the meadow. It was just like playing a small salmon, and I can well believe that the fish would have run out fifty or sixty yards of line, as Blagdon trout sometimes do, if it had been hooked on the shallows in the open lake. It was a shapely, silvery fish, and I tried to persuade myself that my spring balance and I were in accord in regarding it as seven pounds. The too truthful scales at the hut, however, would not compromise with us in the evening, and it was only six and three-quarter pounds then. A cup of tea and a brief rest could, now that the brace was assured, be enjoyed with a quiet conscience. Afterwards, I fished the river down again, caught a third trout of three pounds ten ounces, and rose two others, one of them evidently a big one.

There is an element of irony as well as luck about my first catch at Blagdon. With my mind full of possible seven- and eight-pounders, it never occurred to me that I ought to have the big one put into a glass case, cast, modelled, or otherwise made immortal, albeit much the biggest I have ever caught on a fly. In the previous year a fish of six and three-quarter pounds would have been nothing out of the way. But—there has not been a trout so big caught at Blagdon since! A fish of six pounds six ounces was killed by a boat-angler on the same day, and I think one or two others may have been taken later which just exceeded six pounds, but I am pretty certain there have not been half a dozen of them in the four seasons that have elapsed since the great year 1905. I wish I had realized how lucky I was, and done the right thing by my trophy, instead of letting it be ingloriously eaten. Not even a paper outline remains to tell the tale.

After that first day luck seemed to desert me at Blagdon. I fished it from boat, I fished it from bank, and caught hardly anything. In fact, I began to regard the place as bewitched, so blank were my days, so vile the weather. Each subsequent visit seemed to give less result than the one before it, though other anglers continued from time to time to get their six or eight fish, averaging about three pounds. I suspect that Fate thought I had had as much success as was good for me, and set herself to humble my proud spirit. She did it. I well remember one of the days she gave me.

It was about the worst Blagdon has ever known. The wind from the north-west was bitterly cold, and

about luncheon-time the waves at the upper end of the lake were running mountains high and foam-crested. Carr's manful work with the sculls and my diligent casting with the flies resulted in exactly one short rise. All we could do was to hope for a cessation of wind and a warmer time towards evening. Meanwhile, I left the boat and tried casting a small fly-spoon from the shore. Result—one two-year-old returned, and one better fish hooked and lost. After that tea in the fishing-hut, and then to ship again. The wind really did begin to drop about 5 p.m., and I began to hope once more; but a long, long drift yielded not so much as a rise, and we exchanged gloomy views as to the weight of the bag. Then all of a sudden the trout began to show themselves, practically for the first time in four days. All round the boat great fish were coming up with a quiet swirl or roll, some of them showing head and shoulders, others only a broad tail. It was really a wonderful sight for the three-quarters of an hour it lasted, and I felt quite certain that I was going to make up for lost time. I worked tremendously hard, got wonderfully excited, tried fly after fly, great and small—moderately small, that is—covered fish after fish, and caught nothing. I never saw so many big fish moving in my life as on that evening, but I touched not a single one of them. It was tantalization of the worst kind. I then and there registered a vow never to go near Blagdon again.

Of course one does not keep that sort of vow, and I have since in a very modest way had improved sport, but by an alteration of method. The sight of those big fish that evening, all of them apparently feeding on

surface food—there was a good deal of fly on the water—caused me to meditate deeply, and I finally came to the conclusion that I ought to have tried them with *quite* small flies, not merely the loch patterns which had been used as a change, but real imitations of the insects on and in the water. Opportunity for testing this theory properly did not come for some time (I had some small results on one visit), but at last, in September, 1909, I found myself at Blagdon once more in company with M., a very cunning fisher, who ties his own flies, and can imitate anything on the spur of the moment. We were both resolute to give the small fly, especially the dry fly, a trial, and see whether something could not be done with it.

Thundery skies, tearing winds, and driving rains—the mixed weather of our visit—were much against us, though they were not so hostile to the ordinary and perhaps more productive kind of fishing. Still, we had some results, such as they were. M., who set about the business in the most resourceful manner, had better results than I. The joint bag of three days confirms me in the opinion that in some circumstances it would pay anglers to use small flies even for Blagdon's big fish. This is not a new doctrine, of course. I know that many good fishermen have used, and do use, the small fly there from time to time with more or less success. But I am inclined to think that either conditions or the trout's habits have changed somewhat, and that small flies are now better worth a trial than ever they were before. That they can supersede the salmon-fly altogether I do not believe, but they may certainly serve as a valuable addition to it. The fish,

big ones as well as small, undoubtedly feed at some times either on fly, fly larvæ, or other small food, and when they are doing that they are to be caught with an imitation of the natural insect. When, on the other hand, they are feeding on sticklebacks, the salmon-fly is obviously a better lure, as it is when they are not visibly feeding at all, and have to be fetched up from the bottom.

The small fly, therefore, according to our experience, is the thing to use when there is a rise, the big fly at most other times. On some days, it may be, there will not be a rise at all, for that depends on the amount of fly on the water; but even then a certain number of fish may possibly be found in very shallow water, cruising about with their back fins or tails showing from time to time. If there is no fly about, such fish are probably taking the little beetles of the water-boatman type, which simply swarm all over the lake, or hunting for sticklebacks; an occasional rush and boil will show when these are the quarry. Sometimes, at any rate, a feeder of this sort will take a dry fly. After a dull morning, during which I had flogged away with two grilse flies all along the shore, from the embankment to the corner where Butcombe stream runs in, I at last found a fish cruising on the shallows at the edge of the river. Once, at least, he made a rush eloquent of sticklebacks, but took no notice of the silver-bodied fly which fell near him. However, he still continued to feed. I changed the tackle, tied on a Wickham on a No. 3 hook, and put it over him, or rather near him, dry. He literally rushed upon it from quite two yards away, and after a longish fight I got him out, a brown

trout of three pounds, rather lanky, but otherwise in good condition.

After that I had an interview with a wasp, a sleepily vicious September brute, which was anxious to make someone pay for the wet day that was annoying it, and which—I grieve to have to confess it—put me to headlong flight. Worse than that, it followed doggedly in pursuit, until there was nothing for it but to turn and give battle. It settled on me two or three times, hat and glasses fell off, and altogether it was an anxious time. I won in the end, but the moral victory was with my assailant. I have never been at my ease with wasps since I stirred up a nest with the handle of my landing-net, inadvertently, of course.

To return to the fishing, a little later I met M., and found that he had got a noble brace, one a rainbow of three and a half pounds, and the other a brown trout of three and three-quarter pounds, both on dry fly, a hackle sedge of his own tying, besides a small rainbow of one and a quarter pounds, which he had kept for breakfast—and choicely good it was at that meal. He had been using only a little nine-foot split cane, and had had a rare fight with each of the big ones. We had an early tea, and got on the water again about 4 p.m. I stayed on the Blagdon shore near the embankment, and he went along towards Butcombe. The sky cleared by five o'clock, a gleam of sun heralded a fine evening, and opposite to where I was fish began to rise or bulge. There were eight or ten of them within reach of a long cast, but they wandered a great deal, and the wind in my face was troublesome. I am not sure that I covered more than two of them fairly. Of

these I caught one, two and three-quarter pounds, and rose the other, both with the Wickham fished dry. The second took me unawares as I was lighting a cigarette, the fly meanwhile resting placidly on the water, and the first intimation I had of it was seeing the line drawn out. Of course I missed him. The rest either did not see my fly, or, probably, would have none of it, but it was a fascinating business, as some of them were undoubtedly very big fish; the distance between their heads and tails seemed very spacious. It was purely a local rise, for when M. turned up at dusk he reported that he had scarcely seen a fish move. The bank-fisher at Blagdon must, I think, expect to find the rise generally rather local. The sheltered shore is usually the best to make for, but this evening it was not so.

The morrow was Sunday, and, of course, a perfect day, and fish were rising well, some of them close in shore. Monday, when we resumed the rod, was horrid, a day of gloom and occasional rain. M. got a brace of rainbows in the morning (best, two pounds two ounces), both on a small green-bodied fly that he had tied to imitate a gnat which the fish were taking on Saturday, and which he fished wet. I got nothing till the evening, when I found three or four rainbows rising in a sheltered bay, rose three of them with a Greenwell's glory, No. 3 hook, sparsely dressed, fished wet, but only landed one, one and three-quarter pounds. About 6.30 p.m. what rise there was stopped altogether, and M. went home. I put on a tiny Silver Doctor, the smallest I possessed, and followed him slowly, keeping a lookout for minnowing fish. Two such were dis-

covered. One, a rainbow of about two pounds, was lost after a longish fight. The other took me at the entrance to a ditch, and went off like a mad thing, running out thirty or forty yards of line in two rushes, and making me tremble for the gut, which was rather fine. But I got him at last, a big brown trout which weighed about an ounce less than four pounds, and should have been considerably more. The fly was certainly a salmon-fly, but it was several sizes smaller than any salmon-fly I had used at Blagdon before, so I was pleased.

Tuesday was certainly not "my day out." I saw never a rise before 6 p.m., and then, just as the fun was beginning, the cold wind, strong all day, but apparently dropping, freshened once more, and all was up with my chances on the Blagdon shore. I got one brown trout of two and a half pounds with a Silver Doctor, No. 9, and that was all. M., on the other hand, was very successful, for he returned from the far and sheltered shore with two trout, one a rainbow of about one and three-quarter pounds, the other a really big brown trout of five and a quarter pounds. This, I believe, was the heaviest fish caught at Blagdon that year, and he got it on a dry Wickham and with his little nine-foot rod. He would probably have caught others, for they were rising well, but had spent most of the evening over a monster which was feeding steadily, but would not take anything he could offer it.

On this subject of small flies and Blagdon trout, it may be interesting to state what those caught had been feeding on. In one we found some snails, in two or three a stickleback or so; but the bulk of the food con-

sisted of the large green-bodied gnats already mentioned, which were round the lake in myriads on some days, and at times pretty thick on the water, of green larvæ, which were presumably the nymphs of the said gnats, of the little beetles mentioned before, and of a fly which I took to be a Silverhorn. This fly is very plentiful, and lasts most of the summer. The green gnat would be fairly well imitated by grass-green body, sparse but long, white hackle, and whitish hackle-point wings. The other would be more difficult, but a lightly dressed March brown would not be a bad rendering, and a grannom might be better still, since the female carries a green egg-sac like the grannom. A No. 2 hook should be small enough for either fly. We also saw a few black gnats and ants on the water, but no great quantity of either, and a good many daddy-long-legs, which are no doubt taken freely by the fish.

Doubtless on most days an angler would catch three fish in a boat for one that he would get on the bank, and probably the salmon-flies would persuade more fish than would small patterns. But it costs twice as much to fish from a boat, and one can have very excellent fun from the bank, more especially in favourable weather. On a really good day I am sure one could have thrilling sport with the dry fly, and it is quite on the cards that one might get into one of the real monsters; there are plenty left, though they have not been caught lately. I fancy they are fairly well-informed on the subject of salmon-flies, which probably accounts for it. They would not be so suspicious of small flies on finer gut. An ordinary dry-fly rod of from ten to eleven feet, a reel holding at least eighty

yards of line, including backing, a good big landing-net and sound Mayfly gut are the apparatus for the work. One can reach many fish from the shore when they are on the feed, so very long casting is not needed. For rough weather and big flies early in the season, I would still advise a double-handed rod; one could take both rods and be armed against any contingency. But my later experience shows me that by far the most enjoyable sport is to be obtained with the lighter equipment; it makes a three-pound fish as worthy a foe as was a six-pounder of old, and it makes Blagdon as desirable as ever.

XXXI—TWO COLNE TROUT

OF trout, whatever may be the case with those higher beings of whom it, or something like it, was originally written, it is certainly true that "when they won't, they won't, and there's an end on't." And never was there a place where they more emphatically won't than a certain weir-pool of the Middlesex Colne —nine times out of ten, at any rate. I have fished it on all the nine occasions, so I may claim to speak from full experience. Colne trout are like Thames trout—that is to say, they have points of resemblance with trout of other waters, but, as that charming writer, H. R. Francis, once put it, they are "more so." The big ones have their appointed feeding times—mostly either before one can get down from town in the morning, or after one has had to return to it at night—and they never take anything between meals. I know one or two big fish in the river that are extraordinarily abstemious. One in particular, of whom I have been aware for five years, has fed in that period four times—twice in my presence, once in the presence of another angler, and once before the keeper. When I saw him dining, they were quite big dace that fled before him, and he ran a giant's course. One must suppose that

he has not abstained wholly from food between those four meals, but one has no knowledge of his actions. And it is absurd to fish for a trout which is never seen to feed. It cannot in his case be as in the case of some of the Thames fish, which undoubtedly feed in the depths, giving no sign of their presence. The Colne fish has no depths to feed in, and there is not a six-foot hole within three hundred yards of him either up or down.

Nevertheless, absurd though it be, I have several times spent an evening waiting for him to begin. It has been no more unremunerative than my Thames trout-fishing, and that is all there is to say about it. The weir-pool is rather less hopeless than the open water, where this fish has his being but does not move. One does occasionally see a good fish feeding in the foam, and there is just a chance of occasionally tempting one to take something. As a rule, this something is a worm, or has been until recently; of late, it has seemed to me, from the sorrowful countenances I have observed at the other end of leger-rods, that the worm has lost its fascination for the bigger fish. A two-pounder or so it has accounted for of late, but no more. For some years its list of victims was more notable. But the worm-fisher must needs be a patient man, and the triumphs that have attended him here have been the result of greater perseverance than I, for one, possess. It is no easier to catch the weir-pool trout with worm than with anything else, and it certainly takes longer than most other devices. With the fly or with spinning-bait one covers the water, and one has finished; with the worm one has never finished. I

sometimes feel inclined to take off my hat to the worm-fisher as to one who is in touch with the infinite. I cannot emulate him, but I can admire.

For my own fishing I have a theory that the trout which will not come to a fly, or to a salmon-fly, which is not the same thing, will come to a spinning-bait in the fulness of time. It is catching time at its fulness that is the trouble. One day I had a presentiment all the morning that I ought to be fishing; I also had a conscience, which informed me that this was not so. The opposing forces conducted a brisk campaign among the work that I was trying to do. To a certain extent I did it, and was fishing in the evening, which shows the value of a compromise. When I got to the water I found another angler in possession of the weir-pool and in touch with the infinite. So I went off to the mill-tail, which also holds a few trout, very like those of the pool—so like them that I could not move one; but using tiny dace on snap-trolling tackle of trout-size, I hooked, played, and landed four pike—typical Colne pike. I did not weigh them, but the largest cannot have been far short of three-quarters of a pound, while the smallest was at least six ounces. For pike-fishing —this kind of pike-fishing—the Colne in most parts would be hard to beat. I sometimes cherish a guilty hope that the larger Colne pike are inclined to cannibalism. They have plenty of opportunity for indulging in the practice. Having thus wasted four beautiful little baits, I left the mill-tail, enjoyed a cup of tea, and pottered about with the trolling-bait in some deepish water in the hope of a perch, and ultimately got back to the weir-pool about 7 p.m.

The other angler had gone off upstream, so I put on a spinning-trace and Thames flight, mounted a three-and-a-half-inch dace, and began to spin from the weir-bridge. One trout came at the bait almost at once, on the shelf of gravel at the tail of the pool; but he evidently did not mean business, and I saw no more of him. Then in the rough water close to the sill in the right-hand corner, I saw the head and shoulders of an acquaintance—one of two old friends I had come more particularly to seek. In about three seconds the dace was spinning just over the spot, and the head and shoulders appeared again at once. The tremendous downward plunge the fish gave as he felt the hook was terrifying, and I felt sure the rather light trace would go. Fortunately, however, the reel ran free, and there was no break. There were other nervous moments afterwards, for the trout was quite mad. He jumped several times, jiggered like a lightly hooked salmon, bored, rushed, and generally fought wildly. I made certain that he was scarcely hooked at all, and that he would get off. But the hold did not give, and the pace was too hot to last long; after about four minutes I had him over the net, into it, and on the bank. He weighed four and a half pounds, and was, I think, the most perfectly shaped fish I ever saw, except one from the same water which weighed a pound less. He was almost worthy of a glass case for his beauty.

Having consigned him tenderly to the basket, I put on a new bait and tried for the other old friend, who must be at least a pound heavier. For a few thrilling seconds I thought I had him. A trout swirled at the bait in the left-hand corner of the pool, seized it, and

went straight into the depths; but when the steady strain brought him up to the surface, I could see that I was mistaken. He was a pretty trout enough of two and a quarter pounds, but not the one I wanted. I therefore returned him, none the worse for the encounter. The big fish did not feed afterwards—at any rate, I neither moved nor saw him; but that did not really matter. My morning's presentiment was a true one, and I returned to town in triumph.

That fish is not the biggest I have had from the weir-pool. Over my mantelpiece is a glass case containing *the* trout—the fish with which I endeavour to impress my dry-fly and wet-fly friends who think that no good can come out of the minnow. I don't suppose I shall ever catch another like it, minnow or no minnow, but for purposes of casual argument about sportsmanlike practices it serves. A wave of the pipe-stem indicates without need for boasting that "that is the sort of fish we fellows catch when we spin."

The catching of it, as of the other, was heralded by a presentiment. It is odd how many of these presentiments the Colne, with its tempting nearness to London, has aroused within me. It was one of summer's hottest days, and London was wellnigh unbearable, while the heap of books and papers on the study table was simply an invitation to flight and fishing. Finally a Bluebook about chemical manures and kindred subjects settled the matter, and, grasping what tackle came first to hand, I departed unostentatiously to the station, whence a convenient train soon bore me out into the country. It was tea-time when I reached the keeper's cottage after a dusty walk,

and never did watercress, home-made bread, and rich country butter savour better; never was hot tea more grateful and refreshing. And after it there were several hours, and those the best of the working day, in which to try for a possible trout and a probable perch.

The tackle seized so hurriedly was rather a mixed assortment, the spinning-rod being old and a bit broken in the back, and the artificial minnows being in various stages of venerable age and decrepitude. The reel and line, however, were dependable, and one of the traces seemed sound, though it was finer than is advisable when a five-pound trout is not a thing unknown. One must do one's best with what one has, so before long the light one-inch Devon, which was most sound in gut and bindings, was searching a clear, deep run between two beds of weeds. Immediately something came at it with a bang, hooked itself, and got into the weeds before any persuasion could be used with the rod. And in the weeds it stayed for several minutes, to emerge at last by dint of vigorous hand-lining—a miserable little jack of about one pound, which almost deserved to die for its impertinence, but was spared by reason of its youth.

After the jack came a nice perch out of a deep hole under the bank, and after that another little pike to be returned. Then on a broad shallow a fine trout made a good wave as it followed the minnow for several yards; but it was merely the semblance of a run. Though the line was drawn in steadily without increase or lessening of speed, the old fish was not to be deceived, and the minnow came home untouched. A

little higher up, however, a trout took the bait fair and square, and made a great commotion in the shallow water for a little while. But it was only a fish of about three-quarters of a pound, and had to be put gently back, fortunately none the worse for the triangles. Nothing more would move in the main stream, so I decided to go down to the weir-pool. I knew there was a big trout there as usual, and I had waited until the cool of the evening before trying for it, as these heavy fish seldom move in summer while the sun is still on the water. The weir is not a wide one, but a strong stream comes over the sill, making it necessary to use heavier tackle in order to get the bait to work deep under the foam straight across the weir. The biggest fish in a weir-pool often lie close under the sill, and it pays to spin as close under it as possible and straight across. A larger minnow made of heavy metal was put on the trace with two spinning leads above it, the whole weighing nearly two ounces, which was enough for the purpose. The triangles of the bait were rusty, and the bindings might have been a little more secure, but something has to be left to chance sometimes, and they might serve.

The left-hand corner of the weir was spun carefully over first without result, and then I worked along the weir-bridge, casting to left and right alternately, and spinning as deep as possible. At last the minnow fell in the extreme right-hand corner, sank a little, and then was checked. A firm but not too sudden strike clinched matters, and a heavy fish bent the already bent rod as it moved slowly into the deeper water in the middle of the pool. For some five minutes the

fight was a slow and orderly affair, the unseen foe circling round and round the pool, or boring up under the weir-sill in a fashion ominous for the fine trace. Presently, however, its mood changed, and it suddenly shot straight out of the water, once, twice, and yet again, proclaiming its race without possibility of mistake. Then it bolted straight off downstream, tearing line off the reel like a salmon, and making for the danger zone, an assemblage of piles supporting a wooden bridge and hut built almost across the river.

The trout was under the bridge before decision was possible, but then it was evident that he must be stopped at all costs. If the ridiculously fine trace stood the strain, well and good; if not—but the fish would be lost in any case. The trace did its duty, and after some seconds of agonizing suspense the trout turned, and came slowly upstream once more, to resume the heavy boring with which the fight began. The strain was now beginning to tell, and though there was still another leap and another formidable rush left in the fish, the imminent danger was over, and at last the keeper's big, long-handled net, left by a fortunate miracle leaning against the weir-bridge, was dipped into the water and the battle was won. A very beautiful trout it was, too—plump, short, small-headed, and silvery. Indeed, it was so well proportioned that it was estimated at far below its real weight, which on the keeper's scales proved to be within two ounces of eight pounds. The journey back to hot London was joyful, despite the extra burden of a long market-basket, or perhaps because of it. An angler does not

often carry such a load back to town in these bad times.

It is a thing possibly worth noting that of all the busy throng travelling back to London in the same train as myself, not one had the courtesy or intelligence to ask me of his own volition whether I had caught anything. I simply *had* to enter into conversation with people and lead artfully up to the subject of successful anglers before the desired question would come. And then, when I had told them what a beauty it was, and how it fought, and how I had only come by accident, and what the keeper said, and what they said at the mill, and—and everything else, the gentleman who seemed most interested, and had really simulated some enthusiasm, asked what it was. Was it "what they call a jack"? Glory is a difficult thing to achieve.

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
General Literature	1
Ancient Cities	15
Antiquary's Books	15
Arden Shakespeare	15
Classics of Art	16
"Complete" Series	16
Connoisseur's Library	16
Handbooks of English Church History	17
Illustrated Pocket Library of Plain and Coloured Books	17
Leaders of Religion	18
Library of Devotion	18
Little Books on Art	19
Little Galleries	19
Little Guides	19
Little Library	20
Little Quarto Shakespeare	21
Miniature Library	21
New Library of Medicine	21
New Library of Music	22
Oxford Biographies	22
Romantic History	22
Handbooks of Theology	22
Westminster Commentaries	23
Fiction	23
Books for Boys and Girls	28
Novels of Alexandre Dumas	29
Methuen's Sixpenny Books	29

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